

PLAYBOY

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017



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2017 • THE INTERVIEW: MATTHEW
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FLYING CAR • THE HISTORY OF
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PLAYBILL

Nate Walton

When photographer Walton published *Out of Body*, his book of portraits celebrating sex and nudity, his goal was to capture real people being sexy in everyday settings. Despite their quotidian backdrops, the images are anything but mundane, a testament to Walton's lens craft. He brings that same ingenuity to *Spectrum*, featuring Gabby Brooks.



Macklemore

Music, political awareness, consumerist iconography and Nike—some themes that connect four-time Grammy winner Ben “Macklemore” Haggerty and graphic artist Naturel. In *Artist in Residence*, Macklemore tells how he discovered and became inspired by Naturel's futuristic vector style, which transposes pop culture figures into cubist fantasies.



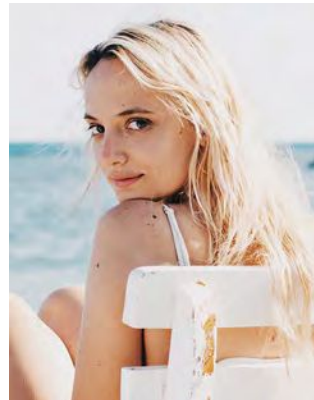
Michael Hardy

A Houston native and regular *Texas Monthly* writer, Hardy has no qualms describing his hometown as a “dystopian hellhole.” That's okay, because as he writes in *Houston, We Have a Party*, the city is also a shit ton of fun. From small-batch-tequila tastings to Stetson fittings, Hardy has your road map for exploring Space City after Super Bowl LI.



Jon Raymond

The military-industrial complex is about as American as baseball, though most people acknowledge only the latter. Such is the premise of *Visiting Violence*, excerpted from novelist Raymond's *Freebird*, out in January, about a Navy SEAL who returns home from war to find he can no longer stomach American idealism.



Ali Mitton

Mitton's photography is a reminder of everything good in the world. Her emotive shots, whether of women running through dunes, under waterfalls or alongside lovers, are both inspirational and aspirational. She taps into that spirit in *Greetings From Greece*, a travelogue of Miss October 2014 Roxanna June's yacht trip across the Mediterranean Sea.



EJ Dickson

When we asked Dickson to investigate the current fascination with underboob, she demurred. “I can't imagine I'll need tons of words for this,” she said. “But I just wrote a feature about pizza delivery in porn, so who knows?” Turns out, she has plenty to say about women's increasingly uncovered curvatures, as reported in *Underboob: A Cultural History*.

Walter Kirn

Perhaps best known as author of the novels *Up in the Air* and *Thumbsucker*, both of which spawned critically acclaimed films, Kirn makes his *PLAYBOY* debut with *Finishing*, a humorous tale about an acne-ridden 18-year-old experiencing two of life's great pleasures: ice cream and sex. Or, rather, trying to. Robots keep getting in the way.



Peter Simek

Having already reported on the glittery 1980s rise of ecstasy for *PLAYBOY*, Simek returns to our pages with a similarly intoxicating—albeit more tragic—story. In *Wiped Out*, the Dallas-based culture editor details how methamphetamine nearly extinguished a pack of pioneering big-wave surfers in Santa Cruz, California.



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DEAR PLAYBOY

SUDSY NUMBERS

As a beer fan with the belly to prove it, I was happy to see Ben Schott take on the subject in November (*The Rabbit Hole*). But I noticed the breakdown of beers doesn't include stouts, porters or brown ales—one of my favorite brown ales is Port Brewing's Board Meeting, made in San Marcos, California.

Will Robertson
San Diego, California

Ben Schott responds: "Sir, you raise an excellent point. As a Guinness drinker, I agree that stouts and porters need more love. The solution, clearly, is to drink them into statistical significance. Cheers!"

HIGH TIME TO LEGALIZE

It is exciting to witness a thriving cannabis industry emerge from the cinders of cannabis prohibition (*The White-Collar Future of Weed*, November), but it's important to remember that many Americans do not reside in jurisdictions where marijuana use is legal. In 2015 nearly 600,000 U.S. citizens were arrested for violating marijuana possession laws. Indeed, the era of marijuana liberalization may be closer than ever before, but much more work remains to be done.

Legalization is not inevitable. Proponents of the status quo can be powerful enemies. In this past election cycle, special interests representing the prison industry, the alcohol and beverage industry, the pharmaceutical industry and legalized gambling spent millions trying to defeat statewide cannabis-legalization measures.

Politicians at the state and federal levels are largely lined up against the forces of change. According to NORML's 2016 Congressional and Gubernatorial Scorecards, even though some 60 percent of Americans say that adult use of marijuana "should be legal," only four percent of federally elected officials and four percent of U.S. governors endorse a similar position. The public must demand better and insist that lawmakers legislate on behalf of policies that more closely reflect marijuana's rapidly changing legal and cultural status. Responsible adults who choose to consume cannabis as an alternative to alcohol or conventional pharmaceuticals should not be criminally prosecuted or socially stigmatized.

Paul Armentano
Washington, D.C.

Armentano is deputy director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).



Writer and actress Rachel Bloom (we'll have what she's having).

ALL ABOARD FOR PLANET RACHEL

I love Rachel Bloom (*20Q*, October). She is stunning and gorgeous, as well as the most talented and intelligent comedian-auteur around today. But she says, "If you say to a woman something needs to be changed, she'll go, 'Okay. Done.'" Seriously? What planet is this on? I want to move there!

A. Marc Shamblin
Maryville, Tennessee

GOING BOLDLY

Noor Tagouri had the courage to do a piece for a magazine known for the complete opposite of modesty (*Renegades*, October). She's willing to teach the audience why modesty is an important part of her character. I applaud Tagouri for realizing her story would be more helpful and impactful to an audience that doesn't share her views and could therefore learn from someone different. Keep up the good work, Noor.

Anonymous
Via *Playboy.com*

WHOLE-HART-ED LOVE

Kevin Hart is one performer who is so good I would see anything he's in (*Playboy Interview*,

October). Stand-up special? Sure. Movie with the Rock? I'm there. Interview in *PLAYBOY*? I'll buy it. Thanks for the article.

Jeff Lee
Chicago, Illinois

NEVER FORGET

I very much appreciate John Meroney's concise retelling of the ruinous neoconservative conspiracy (*No Home for War Hawks*, November). However, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney did not win the election, as Meroney states. Bush was appointed to the presidency by the Supreme Court.

Mitch Scheele
Albany, Oregon

COVER STORY

Mr. Playboy, ever the gracious host, leads us in a toast to the wonderful women who make this all possible: our Playmates. Happy New Year!



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"I bring up this idea of branding because if you're in the spotlight as a young person now, you have to figure out your brand. Are you just an actor? Are you an actor and an activist? Are you an actor and an activist and a musician? 'And' ad nauseam. I feel like I'm still finding my voice. I wish I could say, 'This is my cause. This is my purpose on earth,' but at the moment, the world is such a mess, anything can be your cause. I don't feel pressure to present feminism as part of my

brand, because it just is. If I say that, though, it sounds like it's part of what I'm selling, and that gets a little complicated. But there is a commercial side to being an artist, and I'm lucky that people are buying it, at least to some degree. Being politically active is fucking cool. There's space to be so many different things. Just give a damn."—as told to *Jessie Geffray*

Lola Kirke stars on *Amazon's Mozart in the Jungle*; season three is now streaming.

**“Brand
is such a
bizarre
word,
but I am
fucking
selling
something.”**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCK GRANT





FOOD

A Carnivore's Guide to the Veggie Burger Revolution

A new category of juicy, savory veggie burgers is giving beef a run for its money. One variety even "bleeds"

The veggie burgers of yore were compressed pucks of frozen vegetables thawing sadly on kitchen counters before getting the grill treatment. The requisite fixings of tomato, lettuce and ketchup were never quite enough to camouflage the tastelessness of these wannabe meats. But today the veggie burger is in the midst of a glorious renaissance. Far from being rubbery faux-meat renditions, these patties highlight fresh vegetables and grains and in some cases taste exactly like beef. This new breed is imaginative and filling, satiating the hankering of even the most robust carnivores while appealing to the growing group of consumers who are cutting back on beef for ethical and environmental reasons.

Consider the Impossible Burger, the juicy bleeds-like-it's-beef creation from Silicon Valley start-up Impossible Foods. Although the menu at Momofuku Nishi, David Chang's Korean-Italian mash-up in New York, includes delicious brisket ramen and pork belly-fried egg sandwiches, it's this meaty, plant-based burger nestled inside a potato bun that draws lunchtime crowds. An affinity for the meatless is also on full display at Amazing Kale Burger in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, where the signature dish pairs the ubiquitous green with the likes of cremini mushrooms, zucchini and black beans. Likewise, when Chris Kronner opened KronnerBurger in Oakland, the umami-rich mushroom Earth Burger with yuba bacon fast became a favorite. Herewith, a guide to the best restaurants and brands putting out veggie patties to be proud of.—*Alia Akkam*

VEG-OUT TAKEOUT

At these joints, springing for a meat-free burger is always the right move.

Superiority Burger (New York)

Brooks Headley's recipe for the delightfully messy, Muenster-draped namesake at his tiny vegetarian hot spot in Manhattan's East Village is hush-hush. One mouthful in, though, it's clear quinoa is part of the textural allure.

by CHLOE. (New York and Los Angeles)

Vegan chef and TV personality Chloe Coscarelli is a partner at this upbeat, booming chainlet where the coveted burgers include a smoky portobello-seitan version with bourbon barbecue sauce and grilled pineapple.

The Hay Merchant (Houston)

Just as attractive as the Cajun meat pies at this craft-beer hangout is the vegetarian incarnation of Chris Shepherd's Cease and Desist Burger: a black-bean-and-olive patty topped with house-made pickles and American cheese on a freshly baked bun.

White Owl Social Club (Portland, Oregon)

This convivial bar with a patio and a fire pit is also home to an imaginative beet-wakame-hazelnut burger spruced up with misonaise and carrot ribbons. Pea shoots stand in as a crunchy alternative to iceberg.

NETFLIX AND GRILL

For a chill night at home, seek out one of these flavorful heat-and-serve veggie burger options at the supermarket.

Beyond Burger

The resemblance to ground beef is uncanny, but this mighty beet-juice-extract-bleeding patty (see the burger pictured at left), which can be found in a growing number of Whole Foods meat sections, is spawned solely from plant-based proteins.

Hilary's World's Best Veggie Burger

Despite its lofty, eyebrow-raising name, this organic burger satisfies. The mellow mix of quinoa and underrated millet is bolstered by sweet potato, coconut oil and leafy greens.

Hot Dang Southwest Grain Burger "El Guapo"

Wild rice and brown rice, united with barley, oats and pumpkin seeds, give this burger a comforting, nutty backbone. Melded with *cotija* cheese, black beans and green chili peppers, it also telegraphs Mexico—especially when slathered with guacamole.

Sunshine Burger Garden Herb

The first bite of this organic patty—brown rice, raw sunflower seeds, carrots, spices and sea salt—feels nourishing. Top with quality BBQ sauce and a smattering of fried onions, and it could pass for homemade.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT



DRINKS

The Globalist's Guide to Drinking

Gin

Martinis are manly, but there are more worldly ways to enjoy gin. Here are the new rules

For most of the past 500 years, gin—which has just recently become the go-to insider order of the cocktail cognoscenti—has been perceived as a product of either England or Holland. The Dutch popularized the stuff (it was originally *genever*, a more whiskey-like juniper-flavored spirit), and then the British cornered the market with London dry gin—a clean, crisp, juniper-heavy style that was the base of the lunch-time martinis of the *Mad Men* era. But thanks to the growing craft-distillery movement, great gins that break the rules and incorporate new flavors, unfamiliar styles and unique ingredients are now being made across the globe. Creative bartenders are discovering new ways to use these innovative gins. With that in mind, here are five rules to help you explore the new world of global gin—no English or Dutch required. All the international bottles mentioned below are (or will soon be) available in the States, and they're a welcome change from tradition.

1. THINK BEYOND THE MARTINI

London dry gin makes a smashing martini, but its intensity can overpower the ingredients in other cocktails. (If you dislike gin because it tastes like Christmas trees, you've only ever had London dry.) But less common gins can work in all sorts of drinks. Take Gin Mare, a Spanish bottling distilled with olives and Mediterranean herbs for a beautiful savory flavor; it's perfect in a bloody mary. Or try the Italian Malfy, which is flavored with Amalfi and Sicily coast lemons and mixes wonderfully in brunch cocktails.

2. GO LOCAL

Some of the most compelling gins from around the world use ingredients from their homelands that can't be found anywhere else. Four Pillars, an excellent gin from Australia that recently arrived in the U.S., incorporates the herbal warmth of Tasmanian pepperberry leaves and lemon myrtle, both native to Oz. For a supremely floral gin, check out G'Vine Floraison, which uses grapevine flowers

from Charente in southern France that bloom just a few days each year.

3. MAKE A SPANISH-STYLE G&T

In Spain the humble gin and tonic is elevated to an art form with artisanal gins paired with artisanal tonics and garnished with fresh fruits and herbs chosen to match each spirit's unique flavors. There are dozens of Spanish-made gins, and a few are finally making it stateside, including Xoriguer Mahón, which has been produced on the island of Menorca since the early 1900s. For a true Iberian-style gin and tonic with Mahón, serve it in a large wineglass filled with ice, use Fever-Tree Mediterranean tonic water and garnish with lavender or fresh lemon.

4. SIP IT STRAIGHT

No, you won't see frat boys doing shots of gin anytime soon. But that doesn't mean the spirit always has to be consumed in a cocktail. Case in point: Monkey 47. This German spirit is flavored with 47

different plant ingredients, from familiar classics such as juniper and sage to more exotic ones like musk mallow and acacia flowers. Pouring it neat or on the rocks is the best way to experience its complexity (and with its high price tag—\$40 for a 375-milliliter bottle—it's almost too precious to mix). Bourbon loyalists, prepare to be converted.

5. LOOK TO SCOTLAND

The modern gin revolution began in 1999 in Scotland with the launch of cucumber-and-rose-flavored Hendrick's. That brand is now a household name, but Scotland also produces many other great gins. Sure, the country is better known for whiskey, but it's a veritable hotbed of weird gin, including the Botanist, made from 22 herbs, berries and other ingredients foraged on the island of Islay, and Caorunn, which uses Highland botanicals. Scotland is also home to a thriving group of small craft distilleries making gins that are just now coming to the U.S., including Edinburgh, Rock Rose and Eden Mill.—Jason Horn

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT

From left: Monkey 47, \$40;
Malfy, \$30; Mahón, \$47.





TECH

All Aboard the Flying Car

Until we have personal aviation, the beautiful, easy-to-pilot Icon A5 is the next-best thing



ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW LYONS



Humankind has sent a robotic dune-buggy-size rover careening across the red sands of Mars, yet a simple trip across any large city takes close to forever in stop-start traffic. It's

BY **JOHN ALBERT**

no surprise many of us wonder when the much anticipated flying car will finally arrive and allow us to soar above our congested environment. But other than constantly circling police helicopters and the occasional archaic prop plane, our urban skylines remain surprisingly empty.

It's this quandary that brings me to an isolated lake in northern California. The sun is barely out, and I'm several hundred feet in the air, skimming above the treeline before heading into the sky. Next to me is a bulldog of an ex-fighter pilot, who abruptly releases the controls and says, "You fly now." To be clear, I have never piloted any kind of aircraft before. The closest thing to thrill-seeking motor sports I've experienced has been driving the Hollywood Freeway while sipping a latte and blasting Led Zeppelin's *Physical Graffiti*.

But instead of soiling myself, I clutch the stick and bank into a sharp turn. A smile spreads across my face. The gleaming futuristic aircraft we're in is called the Icon A5. With its podlike design it looks more like a James Bond invention than a typical small plane. The effect is of a vehicle that traverses the sky like a motorcycle does the road. The A5 can also take off and land on both water and solid ground and be towed behind a car.

The people behind the Icon like to talk about the democratization of flying and attracting new converts to the skies. It's a hopeful scenario for a recreational-aircraft scene that has been stalled for several decades. There's no denying that fewer people are learning to fly since a peak in the early 1980s. Current private pilots tend to be older white conservative men, which, despite the popularity of Fox News, is not exactly an exploding demographic. Couple that with the fact that the overall design of small planes such as the Cessna and Piper has remained largely unchanged since the 1950s due to a conservative marketplace and a Federal Aviation Administration approval process that has historically made innovation time-consuming and ridiculously expensive.



The Icon A5 offers amateur aviators private transport for the price of a high-end sports car.

Old guys and old-looking planes aren't exactly a recipe for a thriving future.

Icon founder and CEO Kirk Hawkins isn't worried. Sitting at the company's flight school at Lake Berryessa in Napa Valley, he conveys the intensity of a man on a mission. Hawkins's personal story reads like a superhero comic book. After earning a degree in mechanical engineering from Clemson, he was director of engineering at an aerospace contractor before getting a master's degree from Stanford University. He then left to fly F-16s for the Air Force before returning to attend Stanford Business School and eventually start Icon. He is also handsome and has great hair. Although there are no reports of him donning a unitard and fighting crime at night, it wouldn't come as a complete surprise.

"If I could get everybody in America in a big room and ask if they had ever dreamed of flying," Hawkins says, "I guarantee almost everyone would raise their hands. But then ask who

is actually doing it, and all the hands go down except for a small few. Now, why is that?"

Like so many in the aviation industry, Hawkins believes the reason is overregulation. The FAA requires potential private pilots to undergo a minimum of 40 hours of flight training and demonstrate the ability to fly both day and night into any airspace in the United States. Basically, you would have to be able to steer a tiny Cessna into Los Angeles International or LaGuardia, on a busy weekend, in the dark. But what's truly surprising is that the FAA agreed that its requirements were discouraging Americans from learning to fly. After discussions with various pilot groups, in 2004 the agency created a new category, light-sport aircraft, and an accompanying certification called sport pilot. The result: As long as you fly only during the day, stay under 10,000 feet, avoid bad weather and follow other basic rules, you can fly a lightweight plane with just 20 hours of instruction under your belt.

WITH ITS PODLIKE DESIGN THE ICON A5 LOOKS MORE LIKE A JAMES BOND INVENTION THAN A TYPICAL SMALL PLANE.



TECH



The Icon A5's controls resemble a Porsche's more than a plane's; the A5 has a safety parachute and is engineered for water and land takeoffs and landings.

Hawkins says he had returned from the Air Force and was attending Stanford when word came of the sport-pilot category. "I'd led this circuitous life, following my heart," he says. "Then I saw the rule change, and it felt like the planets were lining up, like my whole life had led to that moment. I thought, We've got to build a plane for the people, like the Mac Classic was for computers, a plane that gets you flying and shows that you can do it."

...

The Icon A5 is a great piece of design. This is not a coincidence. The company recruited top designers including Klaus Tritschler, who previously worked at BMW's prestigious Designworks. "I was never an airplane fanatic," Tritschler says. "What attracted me to this project was the idea that flying could become a power sport. If someone knows nothing about airplanes but gets inspired looking at a fast car or motorcycle, they should have that same sensation looking at this plane."

My first reaction to seeing the beautiful A5 soaring overhead: There's no way I'm flying in that. A lifetime of newscasts detailing small private planes smashing into mountains plays in my head alongside equally objectionable images of myself vomiting in the cockpit. The night before, over cocktails, Tritschler talked

about the concept of stall/spin. According to the National Transportation Safety Board, it is responsible for a significant number of airplane fatalities. Basically, it happens when you're moving up and slowing down and the plane stalls. The spin part is, unfortunately, what comes next. In regard to this, the A5 has made some history. It's the first production aircraft to fully comply with FAA spin-resistance standards. In essence, Icon has built a plane that's spin resistant. For added peace of mind, the A5 also features a giant parachute that can float the craft back to earth.

That's enough to get me into the plane, and soon it's gliding across the water like a Jet Ski, then arching into the sky. The side window has been detached, and I rest my elbow casually on the opening's edge, like a teenager cruising in his dad's car. The nearly transparent cockpit offers an uncanny integration with the world outside. The resulting sensation is not so much of an adrenalized thrill ride as of just simply flying.

It's hard to predict how many people will drop nearly \$200,000 on a recreational vehicle, even one that flies. That said, the Icon is hundreds of thousands of dollars cheaper than a new Cessna, albeit with more limited speed and range. Icon's Hawkins remains optimistic.

"The outdoor-recreation market in the U.S. is huge," he says. "That spans everything from skiing to backpacking to mountain biking, but what it tells us about human beings is that they want to get outside, have fun and explore the planet. Innate in us is this sort of adventurous freedom. If you make aviation accessible, it's the ultimate expression of that freedom."

Dick Knapinski of the Experimental Aircraft Association, an organization that played a significant role in lobbying for the light-sport aircraft category, agrees. "This will keep the flying world vital," he says. "I don't think it will ever be like George Jetson, with flying bubbles that we go around in. Time and money probably won't let that happen, but there's certainly room for a lot of growth."

I'm not sure I completely agree with Knapinski. If anything, a plane you can store in a garage and tow behind your car offers a glimpse into a future where far more people will be up in the sky, whether it's in flying bubbles or flying cars. Hawkins seems to envision this as well. "Look at the rate of innovation and growth in the human species," he says. "Do you think we're all going to be stuck in two-dimensional mobility? There will be a time when three-dimensional mobility is far more prevalent. I can't imagine it not happening." ■



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TRAVEL

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PARTY

Football fandom touches down in Space City for February's Super Bowl. But the big game lasts only a few hours in a city full of grit and roughneck charm. Here's where to go once you leave the stadium

DIRTIER THAN DIRTY SIXTH

Forty-three years ago, Hunter S. Thompson traveled to Houston to cover Super Bowl VIII, which pitted the Miami Dolphins against the Minnesota Vikings. Thompson spent a week searching for cocaine, hanging out at a “sporadically violent strip joint” called the Blue Fox and screaming fiery predawn sermons from a balcony at downtown’s Hyatt Regency. The gonzo-journalism pioneer later described the city as “a cruel, crazy town on a filthy river

in East Texas with no zoning laws and a culture of sex, money and violence...a shabby, sprawling metropolis ruled by brazen women, crooked cops and super-rich pansexual cowboys.”

Houston hosts the Super Bowl again on February 5. Thompson is no longer alive, but the cruel, crazy town he described most certainly is. Houston today is bigger, richer and weirder than ever. It still has no zoning laws—allowing a culture of sex, money and violence to thrive—and the rivers (they’re called bayous down here) are still filthy.

You wouldn’t know any of this from the Convention and Visitors Bureau, which has been engaged in a decades-long propaganda campaign to clean up Houston’s image. The city spent \$1.5 billion to build a new downtown dining and entertainment district, expedited for Super Bowl LI. Tourists who stay there will find themselves in a glittering ghetto of chain hotels and chain restaurants, all within walking distance.

That should be a red flag for anyone who knows anything about the city, because Houstonians don’t walk anywhere, and for good reason. Nine months out of the year, stepping outside feels like stepping into a sweaty armpit. Even if visitors were inclined to walk, there would be nowhere to go; like Los Angeles, Houston—with a greater-metropolitan area larger than New Jersey—is designed for cars, not pedestrians. Normal city commutes range from 30 minutes to two hours, and public transportation is sparse and inconvenient.

So if you want to see the real Houston—Thompson’s Houston—the first thing you’ll need is wheels. Because Houstonians spend so much time in their cars and because, frankly, they have a bit of an obesity problem, they like them big. If you want to blend in, your best bet is a Ford F-350 pickup, a Bentley Continental or something similar.

Driving around, you’ll be lucky to spot a few slabs: candy-colored vintage sedans with scary protruding rims and booming 808s. Houston rapper Paul Wall, who owns several of the vehicles, says you can’t understand Houston without understanding its car culture. “You gotta relax, because you’re going to be sitting



Locals agree: Killen's in Pearl-and, Texas is worth the drive for its smoked meats and more.

BY **MICHAEL HARDY** ILLUSTRATION BY **SIMON SPILSBURY**

Spidey





TRAVEL



“RIGHT NOW, EVERYONE’S TAKING A PIECE OF OUR CULTURE. IT’S WORLDWIDE.”

in traffic for a while to get to the other side of town,” he says. “It’s hot, it’s spread out, and that adds to the slow pace. You hear that in our music, in the way we talk, everything.”

It’s the languid pace that inspired the legendary DJ Screw, who popularized the Sprite-and-cough-syrup cocktail known as purple drank, to pioneer the chopped-and-screwed sound that is Houston’s major contribution to hip-hop. Although the style has since been appropriated by everyone from Kanye West to Miley Cyrus, Houston rappers still see it as their own and are wary of outsiders like Drake—who name-checks the city incessantly and plans to open a strip club here—elbowing in on their turf. “Right now, everyone’s taking a little piece of our culture,” says local rapper Z-Ro, clearly irritated. “It’s worldwide. You’ve got people in France sipping syrup.”

Z-Ro suggests starting your day at the Breakfast Klub, where locals wait in lines around the block to get their hands on artery-clogging specialties such as fried catfish and a side of buttery grits. Afterward, if you’re in the mood to pick up some Houston bling, swing by the PlazAmericas mall to get fitted for a grill at Johnny Dang & Co., which has created custom mouthpieces for Nelly, Paris Hilton and Hugh Hefner.

You’ll need to remove that grill to eat lunch, which should be either barbecue (Killen’s in nearby Pearland, if you don’t mind waiting in line again), Tex-Mex (try the Original Ninfa’s on Navigation) or Creole (Pappadeaux is a favorite of Houston’s queen, Beyoncé). For dinner, splurge at one of Houston’s nationally acclaimed restaurants, such as James Beard Award winner Chris Shepherd’s Underbelly, where the daily-changing menus incorporate Creole, Vietnamese, Thai and Indian influences, as well as underutilized cuts of meat from the restaurant’s in-house butcher shop.

Thanks to laissez-faire city planning, be



1., 2. Find more than 50 obscure tequilas and mezcal at the Pastry War, a *mezcaleria* serving cocktails such as the *aquafaba*-topped Mexican jumping bean. **3.** In October, Johnny Dang expanded his grill shop to a 14,000-square-foot second location.



TRAVEL



1. Enjoy lush living in an ugly city at Hotel Derek. 2. The Hat Store has fitted everyone from President George H.W. Bush to ZZ Top's Dusty Hill. 3. The Breakfast Klub's chicken and waffles.

prepared for some jarring juxtapositions. Essayist Phillip Lopate once described the cityscape as “inhospitable, impenetrable and unfriendly to strangers.” That’s an understatement. Underbelly sits across the street from a Burger King that caters to the local homeless population. The Montrose neighborhood, heart of the city’s vibrant gay and lesbian community and now one of its most expensive and rapidly gentrifying areas, recently became infested with so many chain mattress stores that it gained the nickname Mattrose.

TWO-STEP WITH THE BEST OF 'EM

Because the city was built on a swamp, the only natural features are its 10 major bayous, most of which are lined with concrete and completely ignored by everyone, except when they flood. Monstrous freeways, the widest of which is up to 26 lanes across but still perpetually choked with traffic, dominate the landscape. However, a few pockets of great beauty combat the endless sea of grotesqueness; Rice University’s campus, the wealthy River Oaks neighborhood and the Menil Collection and its environs are examples.

Why would anyone live here? In a word, oil. Although the city was founded in 1836 as a trading entrepôt, it was the discovery of oil in nearby Beaumont in 1901 that set Houston on a trajectory to become the nation’s fourth-

largest city. Its proudest achievements, from the invention of the artificial heart to the construction of the Astrodome, were made possible by the trillions of dollars that flooded in thanks to oil and gas.

The energy industry may be slumping, but you wouldn’t know it from the bars, where plenty of would-be oil tycoons keep up appearances by conspicuously disposing of their disposable income. Start your night with longneck Lone Stars at one of the historic icehouses—ramshackle outdoor-indoor bars that date back to the days before air-conditioning. Move on to the Pastry War, where you can sample small-batch tequilas and mezcal with a side of tamales, or tony Brasserie 19 to sip champagne, slurp raw Gulf oysters and observe the city’s Botoxed socialites in their natural habitat.

Culturally, Houston owes more to the South than the West and is more New Orleans than Dallas. But if you want to play urban cowboy, the city is happy to oblige. After getting fitted with a custom Stetson at the Hat Store, which has dressed Merle Haggard and Lyle Lovett, sidle over to Wild West, a cavernous honky-tonk where you can grab a seat by the dance floor and watch couples two-step to George Strait beneath a saddle-shaped disco ball. When all that boot-scootin’ makes you hungry, amble across the parking lot to Diablo Loco, a sort of Latino Hooters, where you can wash down an order of fiery wings with a

tower of beer that arrives in a giant glass bong. Vanilla tourists considerably stay away from these fine establishments, which is all the more reason to go.

WHERE TO CUT IT UP

Closing time at most bars is two A.M., and after-hours clubs are essentially downscale strip joints. The most infamous of these is V Live, situated a block from Wild West and Diablo Loco. Open from two to six in the morning, Tuesday through Sunday, V Live is probably the only place in town where you can get a haircut and a lap dance under the same roof. “This motherfucking club got a barbershop in it,” marvels Z-Ro, a regular. “You can buy jewelry. You can buy a Houston Texans jersey. It’s kind of like a minimall where you can see naked women.” A word of caution: Despite the club’s tight security, several shootings recently occurred in the parking lot. Visit at your own risk.

After a booze-soaked night, you’ll need a place to crash. Check in to Hotel ZaZa or Hotel Derek, both recently remodeled, whose pools offer the perfect place to recharge your batteries alongside some of this ugly town’s most beautiful people. Sitting in the shade of a poolside cabana, drinking a margarita, you may even be inclined to say (to quote one of the city’s unofficial slogans), “Houston: It’s worth it.” If not, another unofficial slogan comes to mind: Fuck you, Houston’s awesome. ■



ADVISOR



HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'RE OFFICIALLY OFFICIAL?

Q: *I've been dating someone for more than a month, and I'm crazy about her. We see each other a few times a week, and she usually spends the night. I've hung out with her friends and even baby-sat her dog when she was out of town. I assumed we were exclusive—until a friend saw her on Tinder. Was I wrong to think we were officially dating? How do I bring up the subject without looking like a fool?*

A: Ah yes, new love in the modern era. Navigating the transition from dating to coupledness isn't as easy as it was when a gal wore your letterman jacket to signify you were going steady. Nowadays it's much harder to know when **BY BRIDGET PHETASY** you're officially "official."

First of all, if you baby-sat my dog while I was out of town, not only would I assume we were exclusive, but I'd be expecting a ring on Valentine's Day. Just kidding! You're obviously a keeper, and hopefully she knows that. Does she?

Start by asking yourself a hard question: Is the relationship reciprocal? Does she do thoughtful things for you as well? Actions speak

louder than words, so look for small signs. Is she generous and giving, or is she a taker? Would she watch your dog? Don't be a sucker who invests time, money and effort into someone who never returns the investment. No matter your gender, red flags are easiest to ignore in a relationship's early stages. It can be tough to look truth head-on, but better to face it now than when you're living together and suddenly wake up to realize you're sleeping next to a succubus.

But let's give your maybe-girlfriend the benefit of the doubt. There's a chance she legitimately forgot about her Tinder account. I use dating apps sporadically—when I'm bored, when I need an ego boost, when I'm lonely—but I don't get e-mails or notifications from them. At times I don't log in for months. I could be dating the man of my dreams for weeks before remembering to deactivate my Bumble account. If I were really smitten, it wouldn't occur to me to check my dating apps, let alone remember to delete them. It's what happens to women in the throes of fresh-love feels! The good news: Her still-active account could be a

sign she's not thinking of anyone *but* you.

Ultimately, the ability to openly communicate is the foundation of every good relationship. If you can't have an honest conversation about where a relationship is heading, you won't be able to talk about it once you get there. Just tell the truth: Your friend saw her on Tinder, and you want to make sure you're on the same page. Get the facts first, and don't be aggressive. Ask her if you should be taking this as seriously as you are.

Finally, does she know you're crazy about her? For all you know, she may be having similar doubts. We humans do weird things when we start dating, and hiding our true feelings out of insecurity is one of them. Perhaps she's not sure you've deleted your apps yet. Maybe she hasn't asked because she's afraid of the answer.

We're long past the days of letterman jackets, but the digital era doesn't preclude making a ceremony of becoming exclusive. Next time, try this: Cook her a nice dinner, light some candles, cue up your Spotify "Sexy Time" playlist and delete your dating apps together.

Questions? E-mail advisor@playboy.com.



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MY WAY

BOBBY HUNDREDS

From opening a poke restaurant to launching a unisex clothing line, the Hundreds co-founder can't stop moving the needle

AS TOLD TO **ROB BRINK**

My parents are Korean immigrants, and I was one of maybe 30 Asians in a high school of 2,000 kids in Riverside, California. I was keenly aware that I was different—that I wasn't white—and felt like the world was stacked against me.

During that time, skateboarding shaped my life. Through skateboarding I found music, and through music and skateboarding I discovered fashion. From as early as I can remember, I was an artist, but I was told there wasn't a future in that. My parents told me I needed to concentrate on math and other subjects I was horrible at. Because my creativity was squelched, it manifested in strange ways. Most kids were under their blankets reading *PLAYBOY*; I was drawing in secret because I wasn't allowed to in public.

All my Asian American role models were doctors or the karate guy in movies. As an Asian American, you were either the consumer or the kid in the factory making the product. You weren't the guy running the company. White men ran the clothing brands. Skateboarding helped me realize I could move beyond those invisible borders and be whoever I wanted—an Asian who dates white girls or is loud and outspoken and can fight.

For the past 14 years I've been dedicated to building the Hundreds, the streetwear brand I started in 2003 while I was in law school. As a result, I've had to say no to a lot of things. The Hundreds has never been the hottest brand. The times we've done well, I was miserable and felt the worst about the company. Other years, we were told we suck, and I was like, "I couldn't be prouder of what we're doing right now!" But if you keep going, nobody remembers the losses.

I have so much I want to do and not enough

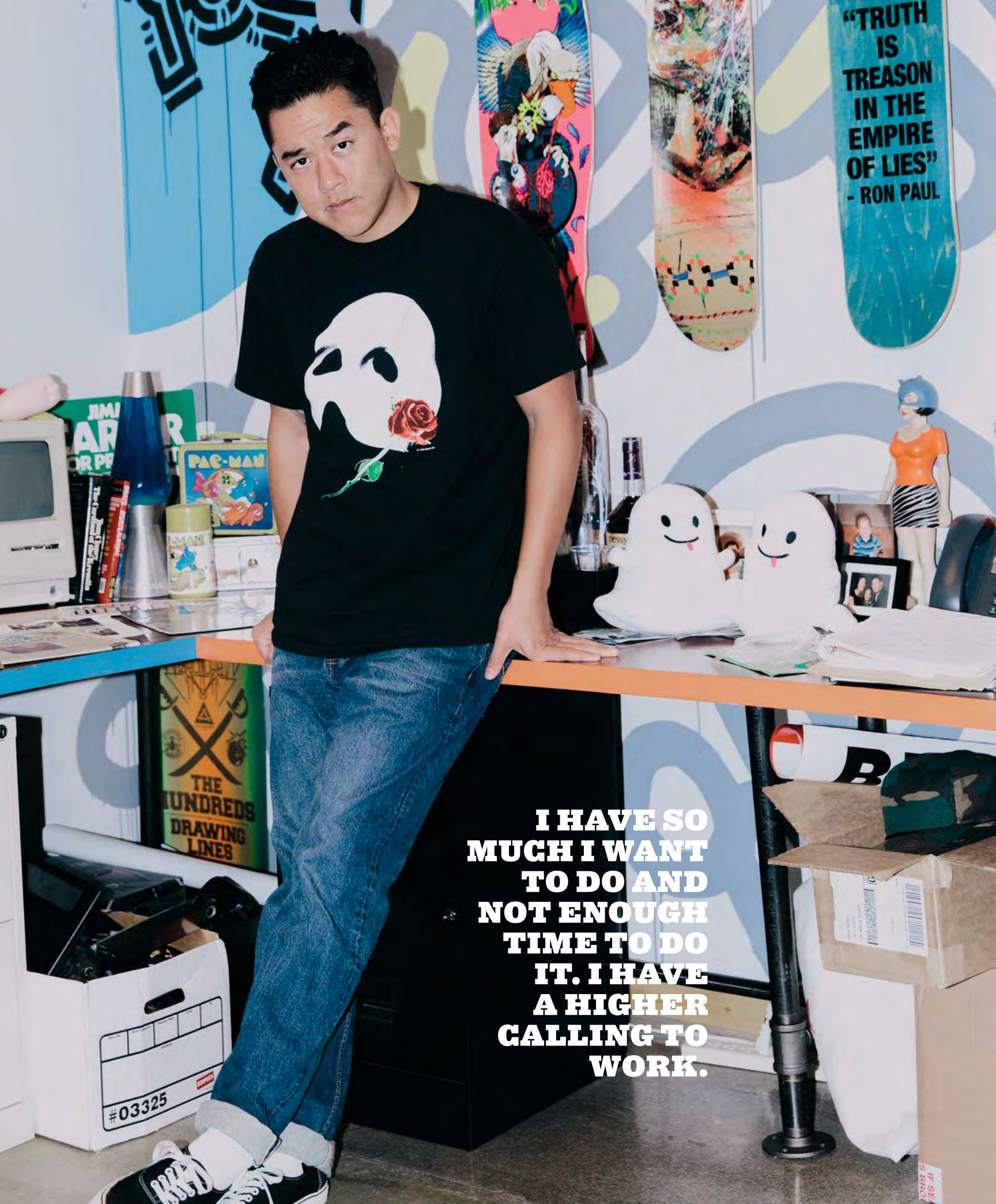
time to do it. I've felt this way my whole life. I'll watch an Apple keynote and be like, "How do I be more like Apple?" I read a lot, so I want to write a book. Every time I enjoy a movie, I'm like, "I want to make a movie!" It's this total narcissistic, egomaniacal thing—"Let's see how much I can do before I leave the planet."

I started my new women's apparel line, Jennifer, because there's no women's brand guys are dying to wear. That hypocrisy bothers me. As a minority, I've always been sensitive to inequality and injustice. I've had great friendships and relationships with strong, intelligent women who've helped me understand their situations. Designers always look for imperfections and try to flatten the wrinkles. If something's straight, you want to make it crooked. If something's crooked, you want to make it straight. Let's give women something their boyfriends will covet. It's the wrinkle I want to flatten out. Of course I got pushback. "What do you know about women?" they said. Why can't I do this? I didn't know how to do streetwear 14 years ago, and I figured it out.

I want people to think differently. I want to disrupt things. I recently opened TikiFish in west L.A.; just because I'm a streetwear guy doesn't mean I can't open a poke restaurant. And just because I opened a poke restaurant doesn't mean I can't direct a film, like my streetwear documentary *Built to Fail*. Successes and failures are relative; I really don't know how to judge them. I'm 36 years old, and I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. I have a higher calling to work. As long as I do that, my family will be proud of me, and I'll never be ashamed of what I do. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOYCE KIM





**I HAVE SO
MUCH I WANT
TO DO AND
NOT ENOUGH
TIME TO DO
IT. I HAVE
A HIGHER
CALLING TO
WORK.**



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THE RABBIT HOLE

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

BY BEN SCHOTT

—NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS—

Nearly two thirds, or 62%, of Americans make New Year's resolutions (according to a 2015 University of Scranton poll), but only 8% keep them. Below are the most common:

- [1] Lose weight. [2] Get organized.
- [3] Spend less, save more.
- [4] Enjoy life to the fullest.
- [5] Stay fit and healthy.
- [6] Learn something exciting.
- [7] Quit smoking.
- [8] Help others in their dreams.
- [9] Fall in love.
- [10] Spend more time with family.

—HNY > DUI > RIP—

January 1 is the second-deadliest day on America's roads, narrowly beaten in carnage only by July 4. On average, 118 people die in **TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS** each New Year's Day, according to data from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. In 62% of these fatal incidents at least one participant tested over the legal **ALCOHOL LIMIT**.

—HOOKING UP—

Below are the most popular public places in which to **HOOK UP** on New Year's Eve, according to a survey of singles by Miss Travel:

<i>How about it?</i>	%	Taxi	10
Public restroom ..	35	Elevator	8
Stairwell	26	Hallway	5
Balcony	13	Coat closet	3

"The only way to spend New Year's Eve is either quietly with friends or in a brothel."

—W.H. AUDEN



—VERY SUPERSTITIOUS—

As the ball drops, the fizz pops and the fireworks (inevitably) flop, remember that, according to the 1903 **ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF SUPERSTITIONS**, what you do (or don't do) on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day will impact the rest of 2017:

LUCKY » Drinking the last *"lucky glass"* of wine (especially if it's from the last bottle); cooking *cabbage*; hanging decorative *oranges*; paying off any *debts*; putting on *clean clothes*; giving away or receiving *money*; eating *rice* and *peas*.

UNLUCKY » Sowing *crops*; doing *laundry* ("washing clothes on New Year's Day, washes friendship clean away"); refusing to give *charity* to a beggar or declining to do a favor; not having a *calendar* for the year ahead; eating *apples*; *spending money* for three days on anything other than *candy* and *refreshments*; having a *corpse* in the house; letting the *fire* go out.

—Y2K • MM/DD/YY—



As the year 2000 loomed, techies around the world began to regret that, for memory-saving reasons that now seem quaint, many computers abbreviated dates to six digits: **MM/DD/YY**. This worked well for a century that began with 19. But when the real world hit 2000, would the virtual world return to 1900? And if it did, what would happen to stock markets, air traffic control, power stations and nuclear missiles? Preparations for the **Y2K BUG** were vast: The global spend was \$300 billion to \$500 billion, of which America spent \$100 billion. And then: Nothing happened. Geeks still debate whether Y2K was a myth or a genuine threat averted by massive investment and international cooperation. But what do they know? As this 1999 Gallup poll shows, people couldn't even agree on which date **THE NEW MILLENNIUM** began:

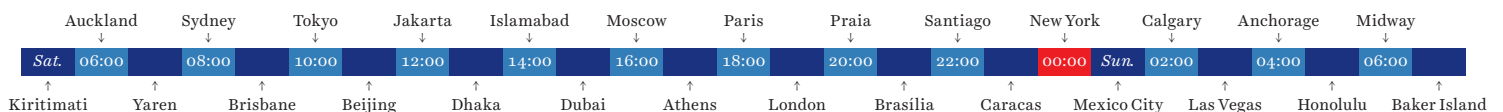


—FIRST FOOT—



A number of cultures share the tradition of **FIRST FOOT**—a belief that the first person to cross a threshold on January 1 will define the household's fortunes for the year ahead. In Scotland, a *female FIRST FOOT* was considered inauspicious, as were those of men with *limps*, *hunches*, *flat feet* or *squints*. Since a lucky **FIRST FOOT** was vital, handsome, dark-haired men (bearing coal, iron and whiskey) would be pre-invited to force fate's hand.

—NEW YEAR'S EVE vs. THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS—





20Q

FRIED ARMISEN

TV's most prolific shape-shifter, the bespectacled face of Portlandia and Documentary Now!, gives a rare glimpse of his past, his process and his loathing of scorpions

BY **DANIELLE BACHER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAN MONICK**

Q1: *What were you like as a kid?*

ARMISEN: I was really into comedy and music, not unlike the way I am now. I was not good at sports. I sat at the very front of the classroom because of my last name, so I got to face everyone, and I tried to make them laugh. I liked attention, which is the same reason I picked the drums as an instrument. The drummer gets the most attention. It's a fact. Think of where your eyes go when you're watching a show; they always go to the drum set. It's like this altar of things, and it's so noisy with so much going on. It's the best instrument in the band.

Q2: *You came up as a drummer in a punk band. What punk music do you listen to nowadays?*

ARMISEN: I will always love the Damned, Hüsker Dü and the Misfits. Punk speaks to me like nothing else does. As far as newer bands, there's one called Bully. They make me excited for

punk rock again. And Japandroids. The scope of it—it's not just the fast bands that we think of. There are so many different types of bands, mellow bands, that are part of the punk scene. I think of Joanna Newsom as punk.

Q3: *You used to impersonate Prince. Were you a fan of his work, and did his death hit you hard?*

ARMISEN: I was and am obsessed with Prince. I thought I knew what was cool, but his look and his music turned my world upside down. I met him at *Saturday Night Live*. His presence was very sure, very male. The whole room could feel it, like a magnet. I'm still bummed out about how he died. I think addiction is a powerful thing, and you don't know until you're in it. I didn't know him personally, so I can't speak to whether he was an addict, but I'm just sad that it could have been avoided. I'm sad he was alone in an elevator, when he was so loved. All I can really do is appreciate

his life. We're all lucky to have lived in the same time as he did.

Q4: *You work with fellow SNL alums Bill Hader and Seth Meyers on Documentary Now! How do your comedic sensibilities mesh?*

ARMISEN: We're very different from each other, but we make each other laugh. Bill is like a walking encyclopedia of moving images, and a little like an enthusiastic teenager. Seth is a different kind of genius. He has complete concepts. He doesn't force a point of view or an agenda. He is a very sane, fair, perceptive and wise person. It's hard to talk about myself. If you ask them, I usually put the music part on it.

Q5: *My favorite episode is "Juan Likes Rice & Chicken" from season two. What was it like filming in Colombia?*

ARMISEN: I was happy to stay in Bogotá, but they wanted to really go out into the wild. I'm so scared of nature that it was very hard for me, but I loved



LADIES



it anyway. Someone got stung by a scorpion. I blame the scorpion. They are assholes. The fact that they go in people's shoes is so out of line. It's obviously a human-made object, and they know better. It's so aggressive to go into a shoe. And they know humans aren't going to look before they put it on. They can all go to hell. Fuck them.

Q6: *Do you miss being on SNL?*

ARMISEN: I loved being on *SNL*. I loved it with all my heart. It was the best thing in my whole life, but I don't miss it. It's like going back to college. I still get to be there pretty often. I did just the right amount of time and left with harmony and happiness. It would make you insane to keep proving yourself every week. After 11 years, I think I said what I had to say.

Q7: *What was your most embarrassing moment on the show?*

ARMISEN: Once I did this sketch with Maya Rudolph and Alec Baldwin. Maya and I were playing a Brazilian band doing a soft bossa nova song. On the set they had a parrot, and when we practiced it was fine, but on air, it did this high-pitched scream. It was so loud that it took me outside of myself. It wasn't cute and funny; it was just this kind of alarm. I think we tried to ignore it, but it was unavoidable. I haven't watched the episode, but I'm sure you can see what happened all over my face.

Q8: *How do you think Portlandia has evolved?*

ARMISEN: We don't feel we need to prove ourselves or get more attention; we just enjoy making sketches. Before, it used to be an expedition—"What is this going to be?" Now we know what it's going to look like, and we add to it. That's the evolution. Carrie Brownstein directed a couple of episodes of the seventh season, which is really nice.

Q9: *Can you give us any details about the seventh season?*

ARMISEN: We explore things like instant garbage. Like when you buy something at a convenience store to

recharge your phone and it doesn't work. You throw it away, and that's instant garbage. We explore the idea of private conversations, when someone comes up to you and says, "Hey, can I talk to you for a minute?" You know that stress when you think, *What's this about?* We also do an episode where Carrie dates a hunk. It used to be that the hunks were the villains and the nerds were the good guys, because they were more interesting and sensitive. Now, hunks have a good sense of humor, and the nerds have become the rigid, closed-minded ones. It used to be like revenge of the nerds, and now it's revenge of the hunks.

Q10: *Has working with Carrie Brownstein on ThunderAnt and then Portlandia changed your perspective on women in the arts?*

ARMISEN: Changed? Well, it's always been the same. My heroes were female, you know? Artists, visual and musical alike. Carrie is a hero of mine. She's such a creator in the best and most punk-rock way. It only solidified the heroes I had before: Cindy Sherman, Tina Weymouth, Kate Bush, Debbie Harry, Susanna Hoffs.... It's an endless list.

Q11: *Do you find it liberating to dress up in women's clothing on TV? Do you ever feel insecure?*

ARMISEN: No. I grew up on *The Kids in the Hall*, *Monty Python* and *SNL*, so it's fun. What's weird is that I never think of it as dressing up as a woman. It's just a character who is a woman and I dress like her. But I don't understand how zippers on the back are so hard. You always need someone to help you. It's such a strange invention.

Q12: *You have residences in Portland, Los Angeles and Manhattan. Which is your favorite city?*

ARMISEN: Los Angeles. I love driving; it gives me lots of time to think. I feel like Los Angeles is very embracing of monsters and vampires and stuff. I love agencies and studios. I can't believe I get to be in show business. It's awesome. I especially love studios. I still love when they say "Action." I love the music scene

in L.A. I love it even though I hate the sun; I'm in the shade a lot. Even going to someone's house and seeing people from other TV shows there—I wanted my life to be like that.

Q13: *You've described yourself as an atheist. Do you ever think about what your reaction would be if you died and came face-to-face with a supreme being?*

ARMISEN: I would say, "Okay, what I meant by 'atheist' was not like this. This I believed in the whole time, I swear. What I meant was like the *movie* depiction of God. That's all I meant, please."

Q14: *Do you have any strange hobbies?*

ARMISEN: I really like graveyards and tombstones. I want to make a graveyard in my backyard—not with real corpses. I also love any kind of bat motif or 666. I don't know why. And I collect drums. I've been on a kick recently buying Simmons drums, which are hexagonal electronic drums from the 1980s. And Iceland. I'm obsessed and want to have a place there someday.

Q15: *What was your rock bottom in life?*

ARMISEN: That's a tough one. Let's say, for example, my life is perfect right now: I get to do the TV show of my dreams. And let's say that I love Carrie Brownstein, I love my life, and I love my friends. I have a girlfriend. My relationship is good. I'm healthy. I enjoy my time with friends. So nothing in my life I see as a rock bottom, because it all helped me get to this place, mistakes and everything.

There was a point when I was playing with my band Trenchmouth in Las Vegas. We opened for another band, and all these Nazi skinheads showed up. We had an African American singer, and they started *Sieg-heil*-ing us. We stopped early and went into the parking lot alone. We were scared. I realized that I wanted to do something else, that this wasn't the route I wanted to go.

Q16: *You mentioned to Marc Maron on his podcast that when you were touring as a drummer, you were really there to get laid. Do you see yourself as a womanizer?*

MY HEROES WERE FEMALE, YOU KNOW? ARTISTS, VISUAL AND MUSICAL ALIKE. CARRIE IS A HERO OF MINE.



ARMISEN: That's when I was in my 20s. Oh my God, when I was on tour, I was very promiscuous, in a way that I couldn't even focus on the music. I'd think, I know someone in Madison, Wisconsin. We only had one van, and then the band would have to pick me up from someone's house. I was never into drugs and drinking, but oh boy, I was very promiscuous, and I put a lot of energy into it. But I wouldn't give myself a label like womanizer. I don't want to be mean to myself. I can't think of it as a negative thing; it was just how I was in my life. Let's just say, for me, I was not in control of how to have a truly happy life.

Q17: *One of your former bandmates in Trenchmouth was arrested in 2015 for child pornography. Have you talked to him at all?*

ARMISEN: No. I haven't seen him in a very long time. It's very sad. What else can you say about it? Poor guy, and all those poor victims. It's like the ultimate type of tragedy in society in general. But I'm not saying anything anyone doesn't know. It's dangerous out there. It's such a sad subject matter, but a reality.

Q18: *Moving on: You've gone through two divorces. What's your advice for someone who is considering marriage?*

ARMISEN: I advise everyone to do what his or her heart desires. I believe in love and I have friends who are married and happy. My advice is to enjoy being alive and absolutely fall in love. If it happens for me again, it happens. I think everyone is always growing. My parents

got divorced, and they kept growing as people. They both got remarried. They found themselves again and grew, and their dimensions got deeper.

Q19: *Do you consider polyamory a valid option in your life?*

ARMISEN: I don't think it would be good for me. Some people might be able to handle it, but I wouldn't. It seems like a lot to take on.

Q20: *Would you say you're a romantic guy?*

ARMISEN: That's a tough one. Even if I thought so, someone else may not. I think everyone is romantic in a way, even the coldest people. I think everyone has a version of what romance is. I think it's part of the human existence. [*dog barks in distance*] I heard that noise. Are you barking at me? ■



GAMES

VR Lurches Into the Future

Resident Evil celebrates its 20th anniversary with some next-level immersive horror

You're thrown into stifling darkness within a dilapidated mansion. You hear someone, some *thing*, approaching from behind, moving back and forth, a horrid shuffling. Then a zombie-like monster is in your face. She's stringy haired and snaggletoothed, and even though you are in fact sitting safely (if shakily) in your living room, you can almost smell her. Half a second later, she rips you to shreds.

At its best, *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*, experienced with a PlayStation VR headset, approaches the eponymous movie within David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*—the one that compels people to watch till they die. For the 20th anniversary of its survival horror series, developer Capcom carefully crafted wave after habit-forming wave of “tension, then relief,” says director Koshi Nakanishi.

Biohazard takes place in rural Louisiana amid the Bakers, a brood of psychos whose patriarch enjoys such family-friendly activities as force-feeding you and then cutting you while you're tied to a chair. He's nothing com-

pared to Marguerite, a raving chatterbox who's so erratic you think she's on meth. In reality, she's closer to a transmogrified bug. Nakanishi explains: “Living with an insect, not knowing where they'd crawl out from and finding out that they've grown in hideous numbers was the level of crazy we were aiming for.”

“Crazy” just about sums up the gameplay. You're gasping, laughing hysterically, jerking your head to and fro, suppressing the urge to hurl and, when the mansion goes black, feeling briefly but genuinely insane. *Biohazard* is one of the first games with a substantial budget that experiments with VR over the course of multiple hours. Playing it, you will probably worry about what a virtual world can do to your mental and physical self over time. That must be why Capcom lets you play in non-VR mode. Producer Masachika Kawata admits the experience was an “incredible challenge in uncharted territory.” So will millions of fans take to it?

In the 1990s, VR, prematurely hyped as the next big thing, made *everyone* nauseous. And

early 2016, which saw the release of the Oculus Rift and HTC Vive, was not the tipping point many gamers anticipated. But with the appearance of games like PlayStation VR's *Until Dawn: Rush of Blood*—a monster-infested shooter set on a roller coaster—came the budding hope that horror might lead the way to VR's dominance.

Biohazard is a big step in that direction. For starters, the Baker family wouldn't feel nearly as depraved without VR's 360-degree sound. Small, startling noises (there are roughly 10,000 audio samples within the game) screw with your mind at least as much as the sight of these sadistic yahoos inflicting their various torments. And uncovering clues to the horror and conquering creeps simply feel more visceral here than on the flatscreen. The experience is at once freeing and totally addictive.

After all, what other game works its way into your dreams? Don't be surprised if Marguerite's ragged breathing curdles your sleep and the screech of a jump scare wakes you back up.—Harold Goldberg ■

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THE CREEPY
REBIRTH
OF
ANTHOLOGY
TV





TV

*In 2010, when Charlie Brooker was putting together **Black Mirror**—his TV series that introduces a new technological dystopia with each episode—the latest golden age of television was in full swing. *Mad Men* was in its redemptive fourth season. *Breaking Bad* was riding high, pitting Walt and Jesse against two-faced villain Gus Fring. Hell, even *Dexter* and *True Blood* were still good. There were so many sagas to discover, and Britain-bred Brooker found it all to be utterly exhausting.*

“Everything was moving toward these long, complex arcs,” he says. “Someone would say, ‘Have you seen this show? It really gets good around season three.’ Fuck me! To settle into a new big, multiseason epic, it was like buying a house.”

Brooker was a big fan of *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*, but he also felt that a certain type of storytelling had been lost.

“I was missing short-form, what-the-fuck stories,” he continues. “I missed the freedom and the flexibility you would get and the sense of collecting—a bit like ticking off Pokémon. I missed stories about ideas.”

What he missed was anthology shows. Rod Serling’s *Twilight Zone*, which debuted in 1959 on a rogue wave of what-if premises and twist endings, set the standard for TV anthologies. The format soon faded, but it experienced a revival—its first—while Brooker was growing up in the 1980s. U.S. viewers had *Tales From the Crypt*, *Ray Bradbury Theater* and Steven Spielberg’s *Amazing Stories*, along with reboots of *The Twilight Zone* and another classic 1950s show, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The U.K. had similar anthology series at that time, and they made a big impression on Brooker—even when he was too young to watch shows like *Hammer House of Horror*.

Black Mirror debuted on Britain’s Channel 4 in 2011, loaded with bold and sometimes shocking plotlines that once again breathed new life into the anthology format. When it found its way to Netflix in 2014, it became one of the most talked-about shows in the U.S. That same year, a bastion of TV anthologies began to take shape with the incredible first season of HBO’s *True Detective* and the slow build of FX’s *American Horror Story*—two series that have evolved the format by stretching one story over a single season.

Meanwhile, emerging novelist and screenwriter Nick Antosca was dreaming up what would become the new Syfy anthology *Channel Zero*, which adapts horror fiction that has gained fame as internet “creepypasta”—a user-generated matrix of urban legends circulated via e-mail and online forums. When he and co-executive producer Max Landis first tried to sell it a couple of years ago, Antosca remembers, “Nobody was interested in anthology shows. So I went off and did season three of *Hannibal*. Max did *American Ultra* and some other movies, and we came back a year later. Suddenly there was *True Detective*, there was *American Horror Story*, there was *Black Mirror*, and people were like, ‘This is a good idea.’”

Since then the trend has exploded, with networks planning to air more new anthologies in 2017 than they have since the earliest days of television. Ironically, two of the most prestigious producers of multiseason-arc series are drawing on their top talent for new anthologies: HBO hired Mark and Jay Duplass for *Room 104*, in which each episode will track a different set of guests through the titular hotel room, and AMC is featuring *Mad Men*’s Jared Harris in the “anthology drama” *The Terror*. TruTV, meanwhile, has ordered episodes of *Bobcat Goldthwait’s Messed-Up Stories* (reminiscent of another rulebook-shredding anthology, *Tim and Eric’s Bedtime Stories* on Adult Swim), while Lifetime has a pilot for the “Shakespeare thriller anthology” *A Midsummer’s Nightmare*, and TBS has a horror-comedy from *Parks and Recreation*’s Aubrey Plaza called *Nightmare Time*.

So why would anthologies flourish in the 1950s, 1980s and 2010s? Bob Bralove, a Bay Area musician known primarily for producing the Grateful Dead who also worked on

the 1980s *Twilight Zone*, believes the answer lies with new platforms and the flood of ideas that have come along to fill them. “The 1950s, television. The 1980s, cable. Now, internet,” he says. “Each time the market expands for content, there’s this abundance of stories.”

Brooker sees another, darker connection. “They are all periods of uncertainty. In the 1950s, you had the Cold War; in the 1980s, it looked like we were facing nuclear extinction again, and you had a lot of upheaval going on around the world. And now you’ve got, again, interesting times. So maybe part of that is there starts to be a thirst for ideas being explored.”

Brooker was inspired by Serling, who had written acclaimed dramas for television before creating *The Twilight Zone*. “He was tackling really weighty subjects like racism and getting frustrated that he wasn’t able to explore the issues as explicitly as he wanted, because sponsors were objecting,” he says. “He realized that if he moved into allegory, he could do it.”

Brooker’s own use of allegory in *Black Mirror*—which will once again be on display when the show returns for a fourth season on Netflix this year—has led to a persistent “antitechnology” label. This is, after all, the show in which Jon Hamm plays a dating coach who guides a hapless young man into a tragic one-night stand via an augmented-reality device implanted in his eye. Is Brooker vilifying the very thing that has allowed *Black Mirror* and other shows like it to flourish?

“We use technology the same way *The Twilight Zone* used the supernatural or the uncanny,” he says. “Often in our stories what’s happening is the technology is amplifying human flaws. I don’t think the show is antitech any more than *The Sixth Sense* is anti-ghost.” ■

ARTWORK BY TREY WRIGHT



FILM

The Year's Unlikeliest Sequel

Irvine Welsh talks **T2: Trainspotting** and the long, twisted road that led there



Irvine Welsh knows what you're going to say about the *Trainspotting* sequel. If they were going to do it, they should have done it a long time ago, right? The Edinburgh-bred writer penned the novel on which the 1996 film was based, and by 2002 he'd delivered a follow-up called *Porno*. At that time, *Trainspotting* was still very much in the pop culture zeitgeist, a dark and uproarious anti-bildungsroman full of characters fans loved enough to follow into the worst toilet in Scotland.

John Hodge, who had adapted Welsh's novel the first time around, was ready with another screenplay. "Ideally, we would have done it then," admits Welsh. But to paraphrase Rent Boy, team *Trainspotting* chose...anything else. The reason?

"All sorts of different reasons," says Welsh. "People doing other projects, people falling out with each other. It was just hard to get everybody back on the same page with it."

Director Danny Boyle and star Ewan McGregor made their careers with *Trainspotting*, but both seemed intent on avoiding a sequel. Boyle cast McGregor for his 2000 film *The Beach* but basically dumped him mid-production for Leonardo DiCaprio, creating a rift that would last a decade. McGregor, meanwhile, called the idea of a *Trainspotting* sequel a "terrible shame."

Within the past couple years, Boyle apologized and McGregor warmed to the idea, eventually signing on for *T2: Trainspotting*, which will hit select U.S. theaters on February 3. The rest of the original cast is back as well, along with Boyle as director. The plot, which picks up 20 years after the first film, has Renton, Sick Boy, Begbie and Spud reuniting for misadventures on the outer fringes of the adult-film industry.

So maybe the delay is not such a bad thing after all—especially since Boyle wasn't initially a big fan of *Porno*. Welsh wasn't hurt by Boyle's skepticism, or surprised by his change

of heart. That's kind of how it's been with this book since day one.

"I didn't originally want to do it as a sequel," Welsh says. "It was like Sick Boy gate-crashed into the book, so I had to write about the rest of them. It felt a bit like it was two books: a book about these people working in the gonzo porn industry and a book about the *Trainspotting* characters and what they were getting up to."

Regarding the heroin that runs rampant through the first installment, Welsh insists that was never the point. "It wasn't a book about drugs; it was about transformation from one type of society into another—from an industrial society, where life was based on work, into a society where paid work can't be guaranteed."

And though the scenery may change, the alienation behind it is as timely as ever. "People are looking for something to do," Welsh says. "They're *desperate* for something to do." —Steve Palopoli



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SEX

When Ugly Gets Sexy

Why let looks get in the way when there's uninhibited fun in the bedroom to be had?

This begins the way many good sex stories do: A young woman was sitting alone at a bar.

She (I) spotted a man who promptly induced a fluttering between my legs, so much so that I had to cross them to keep my girlish excitement from working its way up through my chest and planting itself on my cheeks as two pink disks. This man had a good sense of humor—I'd been eavesdropping on his banter with the bartender and smiling every so often in acknowledgment of a punch line—and he gripped his drink with a tensed thumb and pointer finger, as if his entire body were charged.

He was also ugly.

Not sexy ugly in a cow-eyed Javier Bardem just-left-of-handsome way. And he didn't possess an intriguing imperfection, such as a snaggletooth à la Jewel or Joaquin Phoenix's harelip. This man was thin-lipped and beady-eyed, with chunky thighs that caused his slacks to gather in the center and hike at the ankles. While this may be some women's dream, it's not mine. He was ugly—to me.

And so was the sex we had that night.

It was sweaty and loud, because that's how I wanted it to be. That tingle when I saw him? That was because I knew I could be raunchy with this guy. I felt every little thing he did to me, because I wasn't tensing up in anticipation of having to hold tight in case my orgasm was too intense and thus unbecoming. I sat on his face, something I had always wanted to do but was afraid would be a turnoff to someone I was interested in seeing long-term. How could I grind my wet hot vagina into a face so beautiful? What if, from that angle, he could see the leftovers of last month's monolithic period pimple underneath my jawline? That night, I didn't care. And I hadn't even waxed.

It was "very fun and freeing," a young woman said of a successful romp she'd had during a girls' getaway to Vermont. Matt, whom she did not find physically attractive, helped her live out a fantasy. "By the time the girls were finished skiing, I had staked out a spot at the bar

and scoped a crew of guys exclusively for their thick blue-collar Boston accents. I'd always wanted to be tied up by a construction worker who talked like Mark Wahlberg in *Fear*. We invited them back to our house. Matt and I had some good drunken sex, we passed out, and the next morning we parted ways. I spent the rest of the day getting stoned with my girlfriends and laughing about our antics."

The same can go for boys. "The first time I went on an OkCupid date, it was with a girl who didn't look at all like the pictures," a male friend told me. "She was beautiful at some point, but she'd gained a lot of weight, and I didn't find her attractive. She was very nice and talkative, though. We ended up in her apartment, and she gave me one of the best blow jobs I've ever had in my life. I've never really liked blow jobs, but after that experience...she changed me."

I too was changed by my thin-lipped lover: I went on a date with him. And then another. ■

BY **AVA CLAYTON**



Libero Ferrero





COLUMN

FRANCOFILE

A conversation on inspiration, Americana and style with Coach creative director **Stuart Vevers**

JAMES FRANCO: Were you into fashion from a young age?

STUART VEVERS: Not really. I grew up in the north of England, in Carlisle, in a very normal working-class family. I didn't know there was a fashion industry until I was 17 or 18 and started going to London, which was a four-hour train ride. I was as far in the north of England as you can go before you get to Scotland. It's more of a factory town. My mom is a cleaner. My dad used to look after criminals while they did community service. He's a cool guy. He's quite tough.

FRANCO: Did you feel out of place growing up there?

VEVERS: I was definitely considered a bit of a freak. People used to shout "Freak!" at me in the street—anything if you were different. Plus, I was gay, so that was a big thing.

FRANCO: You said your father was tough. Was it hard to come out to him?

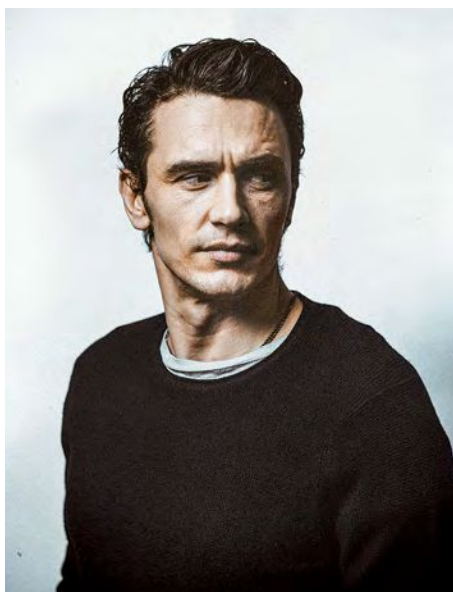
VEVERS: My dad was really cool about it right from the beginning.

Sometimes I would get beaten up in school or something. But I think it's one of those things that make you tougher. It was also because of the way I dressed. I liked to stud my jeans and my shoes and wear too much color. But it was the style then. It was *The Face* and *i-D* magazines. That was the early 1990s.

FRANCO: Did you go to college?

VEVERS: I went to the University of Westminster in north London. That's when I decided I wanted to study fashion. My dad was like, "What are you doing? I never got a further education and you're going to go and study fashion? You're going to waste this opportunity?" I guess I had to prove him wrong.

FRANCO: I had a similar experience. I had wanted to go to art school, but my parents said, "We're not going to pay for that. We want you to go to a regular university." So I went to UCLA for English. But once I got to Los Angeles, I also became interested in acting. I told my parents, "Fine. I'm not going to art school, but I'm



BY
JAMES FRANCO

going to acting school." My father was worried I wouldn't be able to make a living. They said they weren't going to pay for it, so I dropped out of UCLA. It was a big moment.

VEVERS: I wonder what would have happened if my dad hadn't said that to me. Maybe the fact that he was against it kind of gave me something to prove.

FRANCO: How would you describe your style in the beginning?

VEVERS: I knew very early on that I didn't like things that were too designed. I often say "touched by the ugly hand of design" if something is too thought through. In terms of things that I want to wear, there's less effort in it. And for lack of a better word, I was always drawn to "cool." For me, cool always had a touch of rebellion and nonchalance. My style icons were people who didn't look too put together. And I was looking at America a lot. It was a big moment for American fashion in the mid-1990s. Gus Van Sant movies were a huge thing for me.

I grew up liking River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves.

FRANCO: Me too. I own the red jacket River wore in *My Own Private Idaho*. I got it on auction. It's on my wall.

VEVERS: Wow. For me there's very rarely a mood board without a Gus Van Sant original in there.

FRANCO: You worked at Vuitton, Calvin Klein and Givenchy early in your career. Is it tough to express yourself when you're working under someone like Marc Jacobs?

VEVERS: He was so detailed and involved and so thorough in everything. I had never experienced that before. I learned a lot—and also how he worked with people and collaborated with different artists. It was very exciting. But yes, at a certain point you're like, "I really like what you do, but I want to make the decisions." Sometimes I would come to the table with an idea, and it would be like, "Well, I don't like it." You would just have to be quiet and move on to the next

thing. I realized that I couldn't do that. I had to get my ideas out.

FRANCO: There's a lot of pressure in fashion to be new. You sometimes talk about looking to people in clubs for ideas, which raises something of a chicken-or-the-egg argument: Are the designers influencing the people in the clubs, or are they being influenced by the people in the clubs?

VEVERS: I think it's a mutual back-and-forth. People are quite fascinated by it. They always ask, "Well, how do all of you know what to do?" It's not like there's a conspiracy. We all just went to see the same film. We're all referencing a new book that came out. It's just something that's in the air. It's certainly not something I study. It's just instinct. Usually I'm quite drawn to things that make me a bit anxious. If something feels a little off or like it's pushed too far, I'm drawn to it, because I find the things you do that are most interesting are the ones that give you a little bit of fear. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE MA

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INTERVIEW

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY

*It's hard to believe now, but for a while Matthew McConaughey made a lot of people nervous about where he might be bound. After his big-screen debut as a charismatic horn-dog stoner in the 1993 indie classic *Dazed and Confused*, McConaughey got the big Hollywood leading-man buildup with the 1996 legal thriller *A Time to Kill*, with Sandra Bullock, and the 1997 space drama *Contact*, opposite Jodie Foster. Inviting comparisons to golden-era golden boys Paul Newman, Steve McQueen and Robert Redford, the young Texas native got pegged by entertainment mavens as the new kid in town, out to crush the then hot movie crop of wafer-thin, feather-haired man-children. Then a 1999 police bust found him dancing naked and playing bongos while seemingly high.*

Meanwhile, better roles in better movies kept going to other guys. By the 2010s, despite the occasional prestige project (see *Amistad*, *The Newton Boys*, *We Are Marshall*), he had spent a decade charming Jennifer Lopez, Kate Hudson and Jennifer Garner in light romantic comedies including *The Wedding Planner*, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* and *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*. That's a way to make bank but not necessarily a way to get top movie-makers to chase you down. Worse, it raised the question: Had McConaughey reached his potential or squandered it?

The answer became obvious when he stepped away for around 18 months and came back with a career-redefining performance in *Dallas Buyers Club* as an AIDS-stricken rodeo cowboy, a part previously earmarked for Brad Pitt or Ryan Gosling. In addition to requiring him to bring his weight down to 135 pounds, the part earned him the 2014 best actor Oscar. That same year, he shape-shifted into nihilistic cop Rust Cohle on HBO's groundbreaking

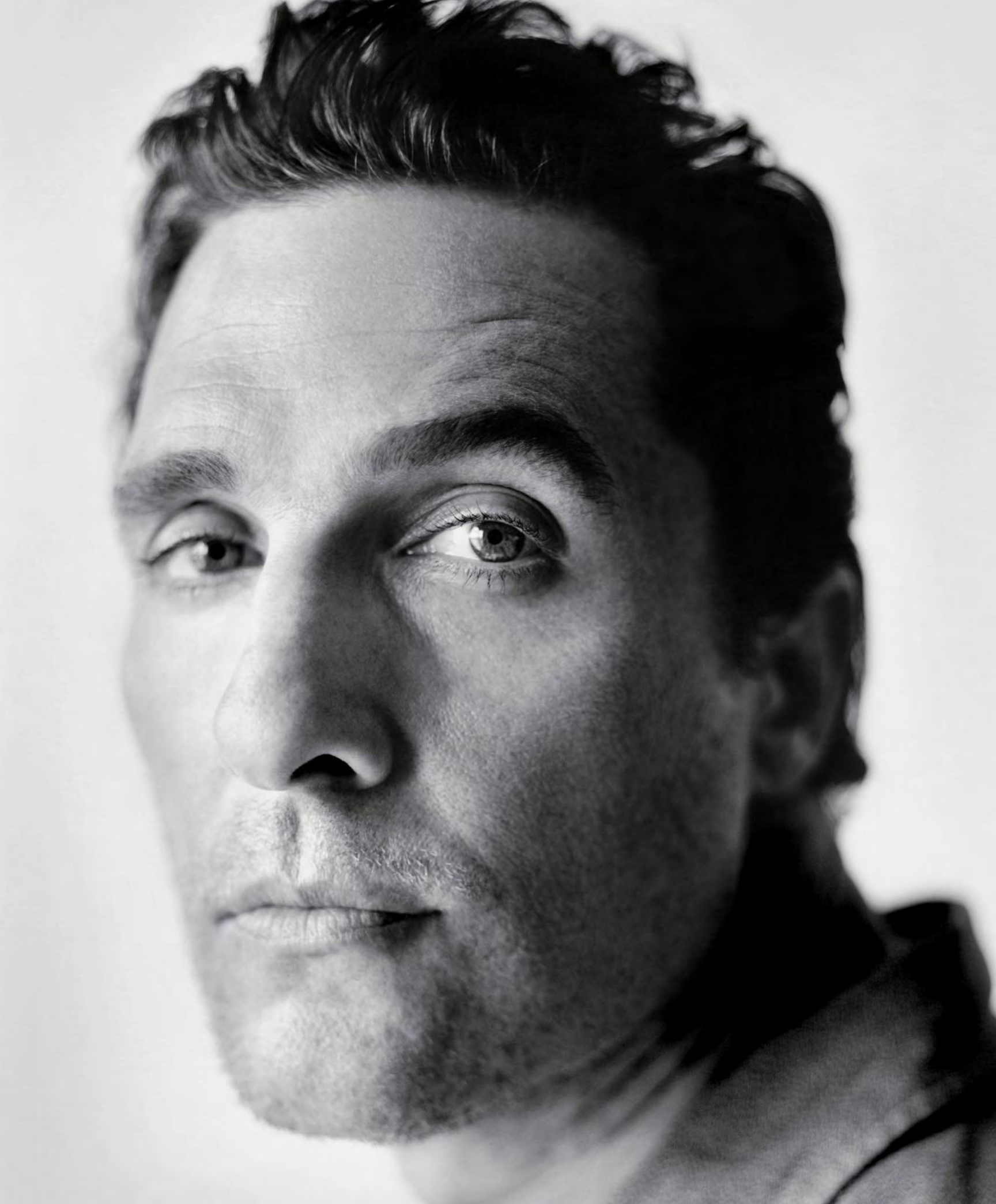
series *True Detective*. Capping these with a centerpiece stint in Christopher Nolan's sci-fi epic *Interstellar*, the actor had clearly pulled off a full-scale career resurrection, a turnaround that became known as "the McConaissance." He was so good, it made us wonder why we ever doubted him.

Born Matthew David McConaughey on November 4, 1969, in Uvalde, Texas, he is the youngest of three brothers. The oldest, Michael "Rooster" McConaughey, is a self-made millionaire and star of CNBC's *West Texas Investors Club*, and Patrick is in the drilling-pipe business. They're the kids of Trenton, New Jersey-born Mary Kay Kathleen McCabe ("KMac" to the family), a retired kindergarten teacher, and Mississippi-born oil-pipe-supply businessman James "Big Jim" Donald McConaughey, who was drafted to play pro ball for the Green Bay Packers. McConaughey's larger-than-life parents brought up their sons with strict adherence to Methodist principles, but according to the actor they were also "wild rebels,"

marrying each other three times and divorcing twice. The family moved in 1980 to Longview, Texas, where the youngest McConaughey cut a swath for himself as a strong student, athlete and ladies' man at Longview High School before spending a year in Australia as a Rotary exchange student in 1988. Vacillating between pursuing law or psychiatry, he instead enrolled in 1989 at the University of Texas at Austin, graduating with a radio-television-film degree in 1993. He had already booked several student films and TV commercials before landing, in 1992, that life-changing role in Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused*.

He was launched, spending more and more time in Hollywood making high-profile films while gaining a rep as a partyer with an eye for famous beauties including Ashley Judd, Sandra Bullock, Janet Jackson and Penélope Cruz. In 2006, well into his "healthy, fluent, single years," he met Brazilian model Camila Alves. They got married in a Catholic ceremony in 2012; today they have three kids, Levi (age

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANDREAS LASZLO KONRATH**





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eight), Vida (seven) and Livingston (four). The family divides its time between Malibu, California and a 10,000-square-foot Austin, Texas estate, which suggests that McConaughey's mantra, JKL—short for “Just keep livin’”—has served him pretty damn well.

Contributing Editor **Stephen Rebello**, who last interviewed Andy Samberg for *PLAYBOY*, spent an afternoon in Los Angeles with the actor. “Matthew McConaughey saunters into the room like he owns the place,” reports Rebello. “We were set up in a dimly lit private lounge in West Hollywood kitted out with low-slung black couches, arty photo blowups on the wall and cold beer on tap. The locale was just right for McConaughey and his singular vibe—that lived-in, uber-American cowboy thing with its undercurrent of danger, a timeless style that has helped make him worth watching for nearly 25 years in close to 50 films.

“Talking with Matthew is a study in Southern hospitality. Once he gets comfortable, he’s enormously warm, with a booming laugh and hands that are always grabbing a shoulder or patting a leg for emphasis. Sometimes he bounces around the room, acting out his stories, and he’s always fully alive in the moment—your coolest lifelong friend who turned out great, despite the odds, and who never forgets where he came from.”

PLAYBOY: Starting with your big-time leading-man breakout in *A Time to Kill* in 1996, up through your romantic-comedy stints throughout the 2000s, you’ve been famous and infamous for going shirtless. Audiences may have a hard time un-seeing the shirtless and pantsless Matthew McConaughey unveiled in your new movie, *Gold*, in which you play a flabby middle-aged prospector-hustler with a stomach that topples over his belt, a saggy posterior, a comb-over and funky teeth.

MCCONAUGHEY: [Laughs] You mean the audience will be like, “Look at the walrus”?

PLAYBOY: Well, kind of. Without spoiling the surprises, you, Edgar Ramirez and Bryce Dallas Howard play characters caught up in the notorious real-life Bre-X gold-mining swindle of the 1990s. You play a beer-bellied, chain-smoking fictional character named Kenny Wells. Is the way you look in the movie a way of

winking at critics and journalists who knocked you for trading on your physique?

MCCONAUGHEY: I don’t believe the way I look as Kenny is eccentric in any way. I wouldn’t play to that. That’s real weight, not prosthetics. My fighting weight is about 185, which is where I am now. I loved the scrappiness and vitality I felt when I was down at 135, the weight I was for *Dallas Buyers Club*. I’d gotten back to about 165 on *True Detective*, but with *Gold* it was, “This guy is a desirer. He fulfills. He’s a *yes*.” That got me thinking about my dad. Oh, man, he loved to eat, drink and host. He was six-three or six-four and weighed about 260 at one point. This guy Kenny takes all of it in too. He’s Cap-

***I figured it out:
What makes
you tired when
you’re over-
indulging is
thinking about
quitting.***

tain Fun, acting like every day is Saturday even if he’s at the bottom of the barrel. Before we started shooting, I had a few months to indulge. If there was anything I wanted to eat or drink, I said yes. If I second-guessed myself, I had to have twice as much. To this day, my kids’ favorite daddy was when I was playing Kenny, because instead of having pizza just on Friday night, it was Tuesday night, any night.

PLAYBOY: What did your wife, Camila, think of Captain Fun?

MCCONAUGHEY: She loved it. I was so much fun. I was saying yes to every desire—without losing my marriage.

PLAYBOY: After decades of golfing, running and surfing, how did the months of bingeing make you feel?

MCCONAUGHEY: My body felt great. I slept great. My back and knees, everything felt physiologically better. Mind you, if you lived on the diet for four years, you would feel lethargic. I figured it out: What makes you tired when you’re overindulging is thinking about quitting. What makes you tired is looking in the mirror on Monday morning and going, “You gotta clean yourself up, man.” I would wake up on Monday morning and go, “Let’s have another beer and cheeseburger!” I really never got tired of cheeseburgers, so it was more fun getting there than to lose it all. But you just break a sweat for an hour a day, whether it’s working out, dancing, running, whatever.

PLAYBOY: Can a transformation like that ever give you the freedom of public anonymity, at least temporarily? After all, isn’t it part of an actor’s arsenal to be able to quietly observe the mannerisms and behaviors of others?

MCCONAUGHEY: Damn right it is. For *Dallas Buyers Club*, I didn’t leave the house. This time, I was up-front, head high, open with every stranger, any fan. But when you’re a known, recognizable person and the world becomes a mirror, how do you observe?

PLAYBOY: When you were bulking up for *Gold*, did you experience any fat-shaming?

MCCONAUGHEY: Some people said I looked much healthier. My mom was very happy until I got close to 200 pounds, and then she was like, “All right, fat-ass, that’s enough already. You look like you

got two pigs wrestling in your trousers.” But my brother Rooster said, “It’s Pop all over again.” He thought I was so loosey-goosey and fun, he didn’t want me to take off the weight. I got nice and swollen all right, but I told Rooster, “I’m going to lose a little bit of the weight, but I’m going to keep the spirit of Kenny Wells alive.”

PLAYBOY: When did you feel the tide turning your way, the birth of what became labeled the McConaissance?

MCCONAUGHEY: After around a year and a half of my being off-screen, I got a call from William Friedkin, who wanted me for *Killer Joe*. I don’t think he would’ve come two years earlier. Steven Soderbergh called with *Magic Mike*. He’d done plenty of things he could’ve had me in, but he’d never called before. Jeff



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Nichols had written *Mud* and wanted me to do it. I did *The Paperboy* with Lee Daniels. It was like, Fuck the bucks, man, I'm going for the experience. Then we did *True Detective* and *Dallas Buyers Club*. The time away gave people a chance to remember work I'd done before, whether it was *Dazed and Confused* or whatever. I didn't rebrand in those 18 months; I unbranded. I became some people's good new idea. People bring up the romantic-comedy years as though I'm another person, another actor. It was the same car, same engine, same me. I just shifted to another gear.

PLAYBOY: How do you look back on *Dallas Buyers Club*?

MCCONAUGHEY: I had that one for years. The others, Friedkin calls, Soderbergh calls, Daniels calls, but this one I had. I wanted to get Ron Woodruff's story out there. I immersed myself in it for six months, five hours a day—transcripts, diaries. I know those people, their language, that anarchic humor. Ron even went about surviving in an anarchic way. There was no sentiment, nothing "nice" about the way the story is told. Ron was a black-market drug dealer—drugs the FDA hadn't approved that were keeping people alive. That was all there for me. We got 130 rejections over 20 years of trying to get it made. It was an independent movie with an antihero role, and it helped me change the way some saw me. You like it or not, it's got a real identity. An independent movie about HIV is going to be important. It didn't have to be very entertaining, but I think we managed to make it that too. It's got humor—shocking humor. And we did it for \$4.9 million in 25 days or so. It worked.

PLAYBOY: Clearly. It netted you an Oscar.

MCCONAUGHEY: That was never something that showed up on my bucket list. But a nomination, let alone a win, would have made me extremely proud of the work we did, and happy too. I liked the film a lot—the experience of making it. That was already a big win.

PLAYBOY: In 2008 you turned down a reported \$15 million to star in a big-screen reboot of the TV series *Magnum P.I.*, an intended franchise. More recently, you've been offered major superhero parts including the lead in *Doctor Strange* and the villain in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*. There was talk of you playing

beach-bum detective Travis McGee in *The Deep Blue Good-By*, meant to be a big-screen adaptation based on John D. MacDonald's novels. But you've stepped up to *The Dark Tower*, based on Stephen King's series of novels, in which you play a sharply dressed destroyer of worlds.

MCCONAUGHEY: I like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, but what I saw was "It's successful, and now we've got room to make a colorful part for another big-name actor." I'd feel like an amendment. The *Dark Tower* script was well written, I like the director and his take on it, and



I can be the creator, the author of the Man in Black—a.k.a. the Devil—in my version of this Stephen King novel. We've done the first one. It's a fantastic thriller that takes place in another realm, an alternate universe, but it's very much grounded. For instance, the gunslinger's weapon isn't a lightsaber or something; it's a pistol. I enjoyed approaching my character as if I were the Devil having a good time, getting turned on by exposing human hypocrisies wherever he finds them.

PLAYBOY: Although many critics thought you were the best thing about *Magic Mike*, you dodged playing Dallas in the sequel.

MCCONAUGHEY: I wanted to be a part of that, but the idea of Dallas 2.0 was not the way I wanted to go. A lot of times you bring a character back and there's an inherent apology about who they were. Dallas was too much of a lightning bolt to do that to. If I ever came back and did Wooderson from *Dazed and Confused*, there could be no apologies there either.

PLAYBOY: It's not surprising that this McConaissance has provoked some push-back. Some of your recent movies, such as *The Sea of Trees* and *Free State of Jones*, stumbled with audiences or critics. Your stylized ads for Lincoln—which helped boost sales by a reported 25 percent—have been parodied on TV by Ellen DeGeneres and Jim Carrey.

MCCONAUGHEY: I completely get that when you have a film come out people are going, "I'm going to pay my 10 bucks this weekend because I haven't seen him in a while and it's a special event." I just don't want to work that hard to not get my kicks or do something I want to do. Some people ask, "What do you mean you went and did *True Detective* on the small screen after *Dallas Buyers Club*?" Fuck that. The writing's great, the character's great—that decision took me about eight seconds. I'm in the not-asking-permission vein. I want the experience. The Lincoln commercials? Good money, I think they're cool little pieces of art, and I enjoy doing them. We have a few more to go. Now I'm also the creative director for Wild Turkey. They came to me just to be the face of the campaign, but I directed the first one and I'm directing the whole campaign. It got me off in a new way, and I loved it.

PLAYBOY: But clearly your choice of projects has undergone a major shift. At what point after movies such as *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past* did you think, Enough with the rom-coms?

MCCONAUGHEY: I remember reading another rom-com script, laughing and going, "Fuck, I can do this tomorrow." That's a fastball and it's here right now. Not to get all Hamlet about it, but I debated back and forth: You got something going. You like doing these movies. They pay good. Then it became, Well, what if instead of this fastball, I read something that scares me a little bit? I realized my life was more exciting than my work. I



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decided to try to get work that could at least compete with the vitality, excitement, joy, love, pain, hope, guilt and spirit I was feeling at that time. I had my epic in front of me: my new son Livingston. My wife and I got married that year, and that also gave me a sense of significance every day, something to work on, build and *be* there for the first time, with open eyes. I was back in Texas, not showing up on the screen and also no longer on Page Six with my shirt off on the beach. That stuff of “McConaughey’s a good-looking guy on the beach, surfing every day, and he’s got a hot girlfriend” got ladled in along with “He just does those light, fun rom-coms.” Now, some people thought all that was cool, and other people were like, “Fuck him.”

PLAYBOY: Let’s go back to your childhood. You were born in Uvalde, Texas and grew up with your parents and two older brothers in Longview, Texas. What about that experience would you most want to keep alive and what would you rather leave behind?

MCCONAUGHEY: So many things were great, like my older brother and my dad being best friends, which Dad loved. My mom and dad divorced twice and married three times. They were wild, and it was very physical and rocky waters, man. They went way past raising their voices. My mom’s middle fingers broke four times because of popping my dad on the forehead until he finally had to go snap. Mom to this day is the first one to say, “I asked for that. I needed that to communicate.” Dad was a barrel of a guy, but he also had these great hands. My mom would get migraines.

It didn’t matter what pill she took, Dad’s hands were what got rid of the migraine. I’d get earaches, and no matter what I took—drops or whatever—his hands rubbing my ear is what would release it. During my mom and dad’s second divorce, which I didn’t know was a divorce at the time, I was living in a trailer park with my dad. We had a pet cockatiel and came home one time and found it swirling around the bottom of the toilet, where it had fallen in. I remember Dad hitting his knees, tears coming down, and putting the bird’s head in his mouth and blowing his lungs up just enough. Damn if that bird didn’t flap back to life. He had that bird for another five years.

PLAYBOY: According to your mother’s 2008 book, *I Amaze Myself!*, when your dad died in

1992—while having sex with your mother—she insisted that his body be carried out of the house naked because she was “just so proud to show off my big old Jim McConaughey—and his gift.” What specific memories of your father got fed into *Gold*?

MCCONAUGHEY: I really based my character on my father and a guy named Chicago John. I’m 19, 20 years old in Houston, it’s the day before Christmas, and my father says, “Come on, let’s go get some stocking stuffers.” We drive behind this strip mall in southwest Houston where it’s Dumpsters, power lines and a white van flashing its lights through the mist as we pull up. My dad says, “Stay in the car, buddy.

I didn’t re-brand in those 18 months; I unbranded. I became some people’s good new idea.

That’s Chicago John,” and he gets out. Through the passenger window I see this guy get out of the van—about five-foot-five, black leather jacket, bald. He goes behind his van and opens the doors. There’s a washing machine, sinks, microwaves, knickknacks. This is exciting. Something’s up, and it’s shady. My dad’s and Chicago John’s backs fill up the open van door, and my dad’s shoulders are making this rolling, waving motion. I think, Whoa, what is it, a snake? All of a sudden I see my dad counting off money. He gets in the car, starts it, hands me this thing wrapped in paper and says, “Here, put that in the glove box.” We pull out, no good-bye to Chicago John, get back on Route 59, and not a word gets said until, “Hey, buddy, check the glove box to see if it’s still there.” I open

the glove box. What the fuck is it? I unwrap the paper, and there’s this big silver watch. My dad goes, “Goddamn, man, that’s a \$17,000 titanium Rolex, and I just got it for three grand. Put it away.” Beats going to Kmart for stocking stuffers, right? My dad loved a shady deal. It’s like he almost wanted to be a gangster but wasn’t. That’s my guy from *Gold*.

PLAYBOY: And the watch?

MCCONAUGHEY: Oh, that wasn’t a titanium Rolex. He overpaid for it by three grand, but goddamn, I just loved him counting off the money and that “Hey, check if it’s still there”—not to mess with me but just “We’re getting away with something.” That was who Kenny Wells was to me. My father did die making love to my mother, by the way. That captures a lot of who my mom is.

PLAYBOY: Did she warn you and your brothers that she was going to write about that stuff in her book?

MCCONAUGHEY: We all looked at it and said, “Pipe along, girl. Go for it. Don’t hold back.” She and my dad were wild rebels but with a very structured, disciplined family. My mom’s wilder now. To this day, when we party, she’s up an hour later than me and up in the morning an hour earlier. She’s 84 and has cancer. She didn’t tell us for two years. She’s a mind-over-matter son of a gun. We talked her into going to a doctor. She did her chemo—*bam*—it’s gone.

PLAYBOY: It sounds as though the McConaugheys never lacked for swagger or confidence. Did having older brothers give you any insights into women or life?

MCCONAUGHEY: I’ll share this with you. I was 11 and my brother Pat was in his late teens. One day his Z/28 Camaro was broken down. My mom and I were picking him up after school. I’m in the backseat of the station wagon, and I see this figure in silhouette leaning up against a brick wall, smoking. My mother’s like, “Where is he?” I almost went, “He’s right there,” but I shut up because he’d get his butt whipped if he got busted smoking. I thought he was seven feet tall. I thought his Z/28 was the fastest in the world. That romanticized version of him is who I based David Wooderson on when I did *Dazed and Confused* years later.

PLAYBOY: Can you recall your first celebrity crushes?

MCCONAUGHEY: Lisa Bonet, *Angel Heart*.



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The white dress, barefoot on that road, that sequence of them making love, blood dripping from the walls, ejaculation. That was one of the first posters I had. Another was Cher. I remember unrolling the poster of Farrah Fawcett in the backseat of the car with my brother and I was like, "Pat, you know the nipple shows through," and our mom caught me doing that, took it from me and wouldn't let me hang it. Oh, Jessica Lange in the second *King Kong*, getting off the boat in those short-shorts. Wow. There was also a moment with Sarah Jessica Parker in *Honeymoon in Vegas*.

PLAYBOY: Did your mother contribute to your education in love and marriage?

MCCONAUGHEY: When my middle brother and I were growing up, she tried to find us girls. She'd say, "I think you're really going to like this girl," but it was more like, "No, Mom, *you* like that girl. We don't want to marry someone like you."

PLAYBOY: How did you first learn about sex?

MCCONAUGHEY: I think I was 14 when Dad and I had our birds-and-bees talk. He goes, "Hey, buddy, drop your pants. Let's see what you got. Okay, now these right here? They're what really make a baby. And this little guy is where the semen comes out. I'm sure the old shower head's hit it a few times when you were playing with yourself and it felt great." It was a man-to-man, son-to-dad talk. It was really cool and kind of took taboos off things.

PLAYBOY: What kind of advice did he give you about women?

MCCONAUGHEY: I remember him saying, "There's going to come a time when you're with a girl and your hands are going to start up here and then they're going to move down to the lower parts. Anywhere along that line you feel the smallest resistance, any tension, go no further, which is when the girl is probably going to want you to go a little further. Don't. The next time you get together, if you still like each other, you're both comfortable with it and don't feel that resistance, it's okay to go a little further." My first time getting with a girl below the waist, it took me about an hour to get from up here to down there.

PLAYBOY: Because you got resistance?

MCCONAUGHEY: No, because all I'd ever seen was *PLAYBOY* photos of women standing up that I had hidden in the barn across the neighborhood. They never exposed labia and stuff, so I always thought the vagina faced east-west. I got there and I'm like, Where is it? The next four inches down took me longer than the first hour, because now I'm going, Uh-oh, have I skipped it? Three hours later, I learned that it faces north-south and she was like, "Come on, come on." I was wonderfully, innocently misinformed.



PLAYBOY: When did you go much further?

MCCONAUGHEY: When did I lose my virginity? I think I was 15, 16. It's a great story but one I'm going to keep for myself. I came out of high school catching green lights. I made all my grades, mainly to make my mom and dad happy, so then I had the freedom to do what I wanted. I had a job that lined my back pocket. I hit all my curfews, had two great girlfriends, got a car and paid for it. I took care of business in high school. Mom and Dad were happy, and I took care of them too. I had some money put away, all this stuff. I was thinking about becoming a lawyer.

PLAYBOY: Not about acting or working in commercials?

MCCONAUGHEY: No. In 1988 I went to Australia as an exchange student. I got picked up at the airport in Sydney and got in the car of this family that had written one letter to me and I'd written one letter to them. We drive two hours to a town, population 205. I became a very unhealthy vegetarian. I started running six miles a day. I lost a lot of weight. I became celibate and concerned about racism, bigotry. I actually thought that I should

become a monk. I had two albums I just wore out, INXS and a Maxi Priest album. I began doing a lot of writing. I was in a prison of my own mind. In hindsight, I was creating those disciplines to keep my sanity.

PLAYBOY: What was going on with you at the time?

MCCONAUGHEY: It was almost as though you weren't allowed a wintertime in our family. It was always about summertime. If it's bright out, you're outside. Anything in life that brings you down, you just turn the page and get over it. In Australia, I was having my first winter, my time to ask the whys and hows, deal with questions of life, existence, time—things that some people skip their entire lives. I don't believe I'd be sitting here today if I hadn't had that year.

PLAYBOY: How did friends and family react when you returned to the States and began attending the communication school at the University of Texas at Austin?

MCCONAUGHEY: I couldn't have a light conversation. I had to go deep, deep, deep. People were like, "Dude, you're exhausting me. Where's the

McConaughey we used to hang with and have a good time?" I even ran into a girl who had waited on me. She couldn't handle me, and I don't blame her. I didn't know if I was going to come out of it. I didn't know if I should. Then I started hanging with some guys. We'd go to the arcade, get high and play this racing game. We started being recruited by Delta Tau Delta. I lightened up. I was a big grade guy. I would take off on a Thursday night and go to the library from five to 11. I was thinking about being a psychiatrist. By the way, for about a year, I let everyone believe I was Australian.

PLAYBOY: You did what?



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MCCONAUGHEY: I was still having fun with my Australian accent. Girls thought I was cute, and obviously I was getting my sense of humor back. When I stopped, it was like, “What happened to your accent?” School was great. There were sororities, guy friends, parties and football. I was making my grades. It was time to get a little bit of summer back again.

PLAYBOY: Did you finally end your celibacy?

MCCONAUGHEY: I held on to that for probably another year after I got back. It was about focus. It was partially religious. It was also about not seeking to go outside of oneself for confidence or affirmation of an identity, like Emerson says.

PLAYBOY: But you got an agent and started auditioning, even landing a TV commercial for the Austin daily newspaper that advertised your college team, the Texas Longhorns. Not long after that, casting director and producer Don Phillips, who worked on *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Dog Day Afternoon*, met you in a bar and brought you to the attention of director Richard Linklater for *Dazed and Confused*. You didn’t have much on-camera experience.

MCCONAUGHEY: I was in an honors film course, staying behind the camera, but I had a pager and told my teachers, “Look, if I have to leave class and drive to Dallas to audition, I’m going to do that because I’ve got this opportunity to get some gigs and make a little money. I promise I’ll be here on test days.” When I went in to audition for Rick, to me it was a job interview. I shaved, brushed my hair, pressed my shirt and pants with an iron, went in and said, “How are you, Mr. Linklater?” He’s like, “This guy is reading for Wooderson?” I sat down, read and just went. When I finished, Rick said, “You’re not this guy.” I said, “No, but I know who he is.” The first night on the set, when I came out of the trailer after hair, makeup and costume with those peach-colored pants, I wasn’t supposed to shoot anything, but Rick started lobbing ideas and questions at me, and I answered them as Wooderson. So we just shot the scene where he pulls up in the car, playing music on the eight-track. I’d been listening to a lot of 1970s music to prepare, and one of them

was the live Doors album where Jim Morrison barks to the crowd, “All right, all right, all right, all right, all right, *all right!*” So I’m sitting in the car, not thinking of that song but thinking, Who’s my man? He’s about getting high, rock and roll and picking up chicks. The first words I ever said on film, and just shot it. I don’t know where it came from. Instinctually, I knew where it came from.

PLAYBOY: Your father died while you were making the movie, right?

MCCONAUGHEY: Six days in. There’s where “Just keep livin’” came from. I put that in Wooderson’s mouth the first night back on the set. There’s a real grace to the fact that my

My first time getting with a girl below the waist, it took me about an hour to get from up here to down there.

father was alive for the start of what would become my career.

PLAYBOY: After that, you did *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation*, *Boys on the Side* and *Lone Star* before being anointed the next Paul Newman in *A Time to Kill* opposite Sandra Bullock. The chemistry between you two was pretty evident.

MCCONAUGHEY: We dated for a while after *A Time to Kill*, and we’re still friends. She and I have another version of our relationship to put on film, and we’re looking for something. She’s not a little girl. She’s a woman. She could run a country.

PLAYBOY: What’s the smartest thing you did after *A Time to Kill*?

MCCONAUGHEY: I went off the grid. I

headed off to Peru, floated by myself down the Amazon for 21 days. I found a remote monastery, made the 13.5-mile walk to get there and rang the bell at seven that night. The next day, I walked with one of the brothers for five hours, unloading the monkeys off my back—things I was feeling guilty about, sins of the mind and choices of roles I’d made. We ended up coming back to the chapel, and I was crying. He hadn’t said a word in all this time but then said, “Me too.” He told me, “If you’re doing what you love and telling stories of humanity, it’s not for you to judge yourself on whether this is a perfect Christian role. I’m supposed to be a monk, leading my life

to see God in every natural, living thing. That’s not what you’re supposed to be doing.” I let out a big sigh of relief.

PLAYBOY: Your rep took a hit in 1999 when Austin police were called to your home and reportedly saw you dancing naked and playing bongos while another man danced and clapped. You were booked on suspicion of possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia and resisting transportation.

MCCONAUGHEY: I saw the cop’s eyes get big when he identified me, and it became, “Oh, look what we’ve got here.” My first call was to my mother. I was feeling guilty because I was not raised to be in jail. What’s wrong with beating on your drums in your birthday suit? I have no regrets about the way I got there.

But what’s the lesson? Shut the window that has the beautiful scent of jasmine blowing in because it’s two in the morning and you might wake a neighbor.

PLAYBOY: You had a very active Hollywood bachelorhood before you met Brazil-born Camila Alves in 2006 and got married six years later. Did your success make relationships tricky?

MCCONAUGHEY: I had a time in my life when I was fine going from here to there, *bam-bam-bam*—healthy, fluent, single years. I had a pretty good spidey sense and got out of it without sleeping with any witches who, if I got up to take a shower, I’d be concerned they’d look through my phone or wallet—women who weren’t good enough to get away with their moves because I’d be catching



INTERVIEW

them out of the corner of my eye. When I saw the woman who is now my wife, I was at a club making margaritas at my table with friends. When she walked in wearing this aqua dress, I went, “Whoa, what is that?” I didn’t say, “Who is that?” Grace, identity, constitution, beauty—where’s that from? *What is that?* As soon as she caught my eye, a little voice goes in my head: “This is not the kind of woman you call across the room. Boy, get your ass out of that chair.” That was a big moment. The second big moment was the morning after that night. I got her to stay in the guest bedroom of my house. She kicked me out twice when I snuck down there. I came down the stairs about 10:15 A.M., and there she was in that aqua dress, holding court, laughing and talking with my hungover, shirtless guy friends we were out with the night before, while our housekeeper dished out pancakes and eggs. From there, I drove her an hour and 10 minutes to pick up her car and never once did I feel the need to inject conversation. You can’t dial up that kind of woman. I have been very faithful with my wife, very selfishly. I like being under her spell. I don’t want to break that spell.

PLAYBOY: Since the good money started pouring in, what have you been most likely to spend it on?

MCCONAUGHEY: I customize my Airstreams, but what’s great about those is that there’s not enough square footage to blow too much money. I’ve got the Canoe, the Tee-pee and the best tricked-out one, the Smithsonian, and I’ve designed every single inch. That’s my set trailer. It can do just about everything but fly.

PLAYBOY: Are there TV shows you can’t miss?

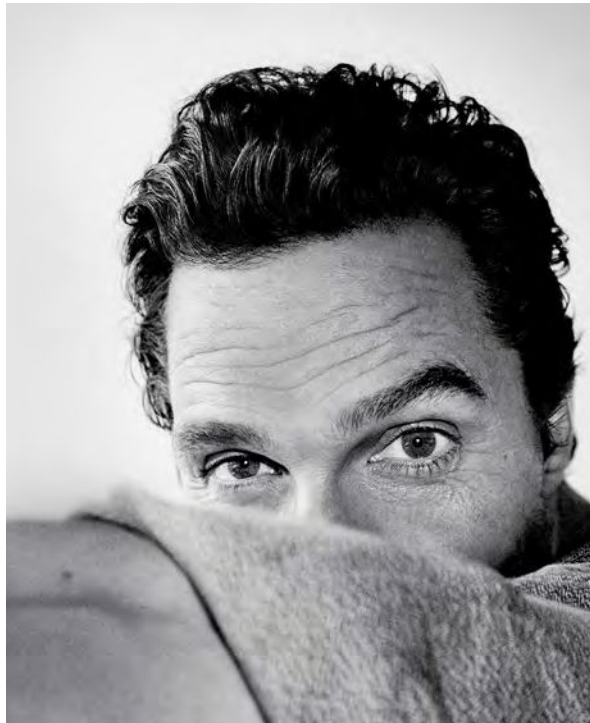
MCCONAUGHEY: The last TV show I needed to see was the first season of *True Detective*. I watched it once a week like everybody else. I didn’t see all of them. HBO’s got my favorite stuff on Sunday night, and my measure is, when is that first Monday that I go, “Oh, I forgot to watch last night”? *True Detective* season one, I couldn’t wait to get the kids to bed and go watch it with my wife. I still didn’t know what was happening—I was like, “Whoa!” I was taking the ride with everybody else.

PLAYBOY: What’s the most out-there thing a fan ever sent you?

MCCONAUGHEY: This is not a funny story, but I got sent diaries from a girl writing me and me writing her back, but she wrote *as me*. It turned out to be a stalker situation.

PLAYBOY: Oh, that’s heartbreaking.

MCCONAUGHEY: She had completely created her own world. That was one of those times that was like, Whoa, wait a minute. I’ve gotten too important to somebody; they’ve created a fictional reality. That’s pretty



spooky. I think she’s better now.

PLAYBOY: Ever felt the need to carry a gun?

MCCONAUGHEY: Nuh-uh. No. I’ve felt the need to carry a bat quite a few times when I was living on my own. And I’ve camped out in places where I noticed that, when I got to my spot, I needed to get out and stand tall. I’m setting up things and making sure I set my bat right out there—because I know eyes are on me—to make them go, “Maybe we’ll pick the next guy.” That’s all. Just to make them say, “Maybe he shouldn’t be our first choice to jump.”

PLAYBOY: Ever felt guilty about your success?

MCCONAUGHEY: It never bothered me, but a

lot of the perception of me is “Oh, he just rolls out of bed and does it.”

PLAYBOY: It’s tough to imagine anyone saying that after seeing *Gold*, *Dallas Buyers Club* or *True Detective*. But plenty of people may have said it during the 2000s, when *People* named you the sexiest man alive and you often starred in romantic comedies and action comedies.

MCCONAUGHEY: People say, “The dramas you do now have to be so much harder,” but that’s not true. In a romantic comedy, you can

laugh but not too loud or the audience may think you’re crazy. You can love hard, but hey, just a little less tongue. You can get angry, but don’t get too angry because you’ll sink the ship and won’t make it back when the characters get back together in the third act. I also dove into some dramas when I was doing romantic comedies—*We Are Marshall*, *Two for the Money*—but I had to take a major pay cut and fight for them. There were 10 guys ahead of me who could have taken those roles. No one was looking for me to do dramas.

PLAYBOY: According to rumor, you barely missed out on doing *Titanic*.

MCCONAUGHEY: That’s been a very apparent rumor for a long time, but I don’t think it’s true. It was one of those auditions where I left and thought I had it. I really enjoyed it. Kate Winslet really enjoyed it. That was a huge opportunity. But Cameron liked Leonardo DiCaprio better.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever turn down a drama you wished you hadn’t?

MCCONAUGHEY: Just once: *L.A. Confidential*. Before *A Time to Kill*,

out of the 100 scripts I would have done, I was being offered one. Now I had a choice. When it came to choosing scripts, I realized I had to be less impressed and more involved. I even carved that into a tree.

PLAYBOY: How satisfying is it to be Matthew McConaughey these days?

MCCONAUGHEY: I ask myself that too. I go into every situation—every film, every meeting—with incredibly high reverence for what I want to do. A lot of times, I don’t reach it, but I’m still going, “All right, that was good, though.” I’ve still got some room to go. Ceilings? They’re man-made, you know. ■

S P E



C T R U M

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
NATE WALTON

The colors of the rainbow have

never been so vibrant as on

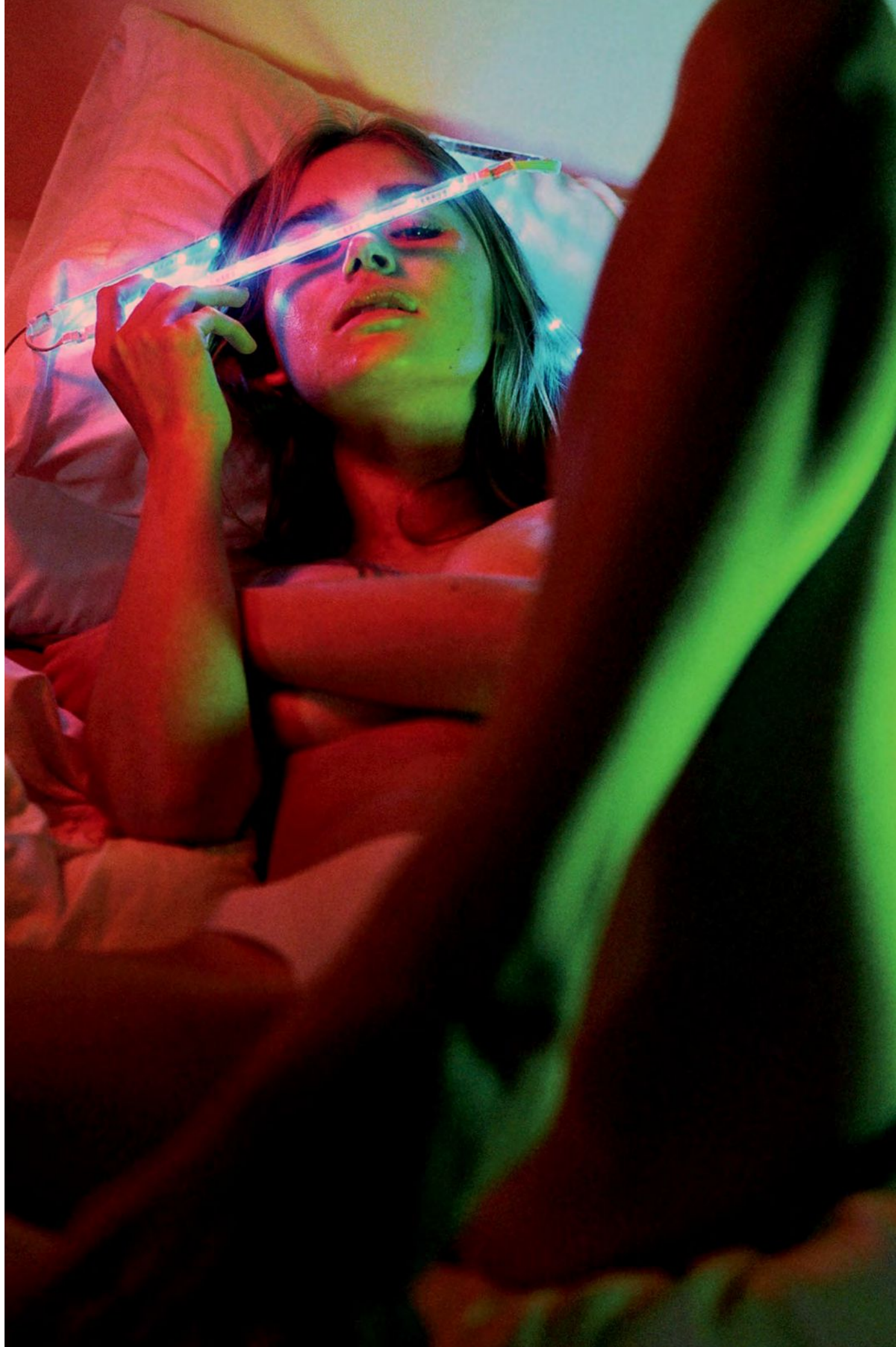
*Australian model **Gabby Brooks***













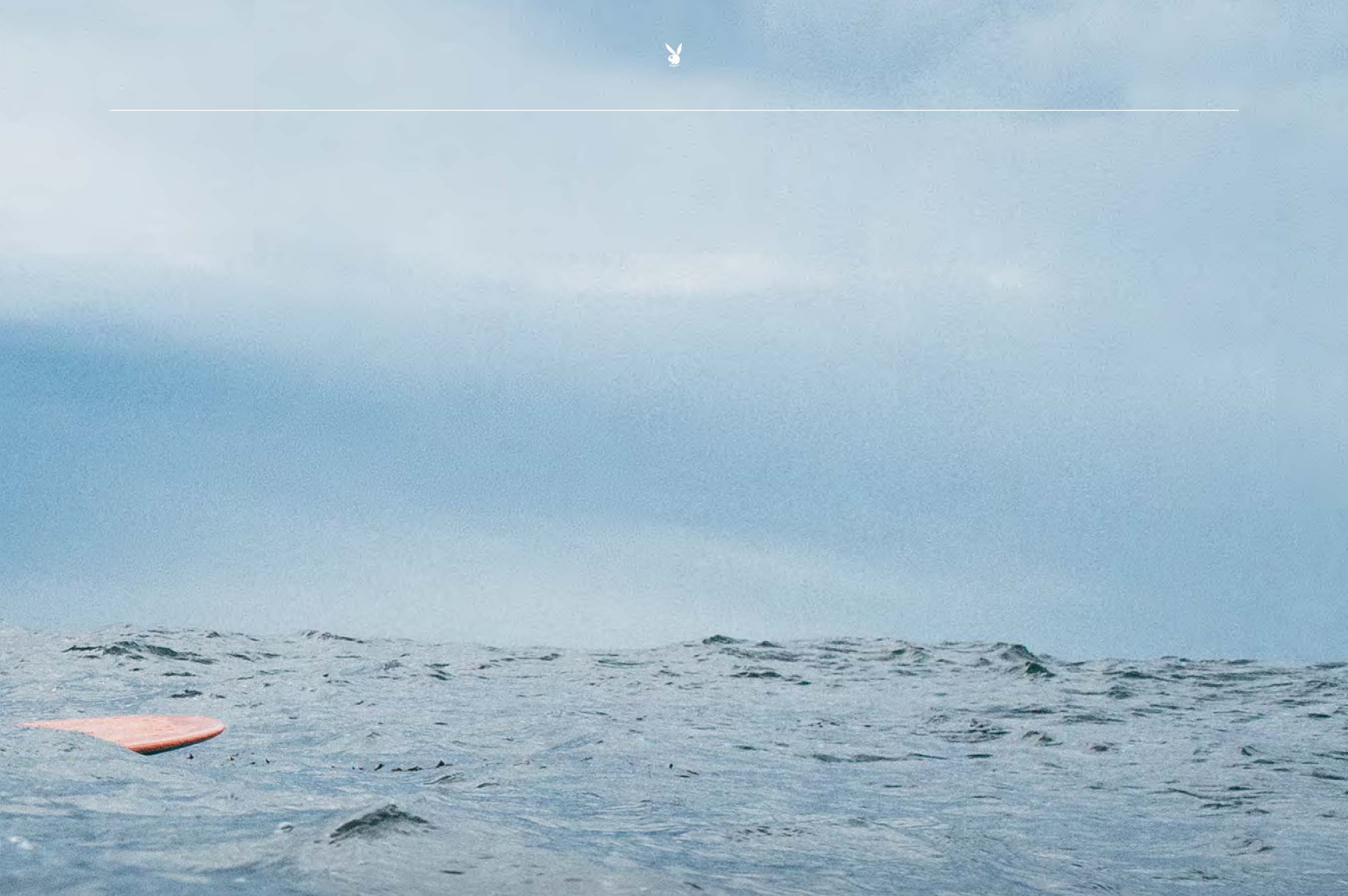




Wiped Out

Big-wave surfing was the world's most dangerous and thrilling sport, until crystal meth nearly sank it

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DANE PETERSON



By the time Vince Collier pulled his truck out of Santa Cruz and onto California Highway 1, Shawn “Barney” Barron and Darryl “Flea” Virostko could feel the LSD taking hold of their brains. They drove north. To the left, the Pacific Ocean looked cold and gray under a winter sky. Metallica blasted from the stereo, but the mood in the truck was subdued. The four surfers in the car—Collier, Barney, Flea and Zach Acker—had all heard the stories. Underwater caves. Shark-infested waters. A half-mile paddle out to a wave that, this time last year, was better known as an outright danger for fishing boats than as something anyone in their right mind would try to surf. Barney, Flea and Acker were three of the best young surfers from Santa Cruz. Now they headed toward a rite of passage that actually meant something to them: surfing the big waves at Mavericks for the first time.

It was early afternoon, February 1990, when they reached Half Moon Bay. Collier turned the truck off the highway and zigzagged through side streets until he found the small parking

lot at the base of a cliff. The white radar dish of the Pillar Point Air Force Station hovered high above. From the back of the truck, Collier produced a collection of oversized surfboards. He barked orders. Paddle close and keep away from the “bowl,” a cauldron of churning, foamy whitewater that would sit on your chest and hold you under as it dragged you toward an outcropping of jagged, toothy rocks.

From the shore, it was difficult to make out what they were paddling into. But as they drew closer, it began to look less like a wave and more like the entire Pacific heaving upward and flopping over on itself. It was a real monster—20 to 25 feet high, with some sets coming in bigger and faster. They sat on their boards and watched with glassy eyes as waves rolled over into barrels that spat like Yellowstone geysers.

This is crazy, Flea thought.

For a long time they waited, watching the cold, lonely sea fall on itself with a thunderous clamor. Then Flea began to paddle.

“What are you doing?” Collier yelled.

There were no photographers on the cliffs that afternoon, no sales reps from the surfing companies, no contest judges or surf-magazine editors. All those would arrive soon enough on Santa Cruz’s surfing scene—along with money, drugs and stardom. In a few short years, these young surfers from Santa Cruz would become some of the most famous in the sport, forging a reputation as wild men, traveling the world in packs in pursuit of the planet’s biggest waves and filling the pages of surfing magazines with images of suicidal drops off moving mountains of water.

But that afternoon it was just Flea, high on LSD, deciding that he was ready to paddle for the breakers.

...

There were surfers in Santa Cruz long before anyone had heard of the sport in southern California. In 1885, three Hawaiian princes rode 100-pound redwood planks near the mouth of the San Lorenzo River in front of a crowd of bemused fishermen and loggers. After the Hawaiians left, the locals kept at it. The waves are almost always good in Santa Cruz. The



HE TOOK THE SURFER OUT INTO THE BAY, WHERE SCHOONERS EMERGED AND DROPPED 150- TO 200-POUND BALES OF THAI WEED.

town sits tucked between the sea and redwood-covered mountains, along a bend of Monterey Bay that enjoys rideable surf no matter which way the wind is blowing. Despite the unforgiving conditions—frigid waters, jagged rocks, plenty of sharks—Santa Cruz is something of a surfer's paradise, as locals won't hesitate to remind you.

It has attracted paradise- and thrill-seekers for centuries. In the 1790s, Spanish Franciscan monks set up a mission in Santa Cruz overlooking the San Lorenzo River; in the 1960s, Ken Kesey staged his first acid-test parties in the town. In 1970, a pharmaceutical salesman from Pennsylvania who had for decades dreamed of moving his large Irish Catholic family to a cliff-side home in Santa Cruz finally did so. When he bought his lot, he took his young son to admire the view.

"That's going to be the view from your bedroom," Vince Collier's dad told him.

By the time he was a teenager, Collier had discovered that the Santa Cruz his dad envisioned as an idyllic childhood setting could actually be a violent arena. In the early 1970s a

string of serial killers earned Santa Cruz the moniker "murder capital of the world." There were stories of parks haunted by massacred Native Americans, of Victorian homes occupied by the ghosts of murdered brides. Perhaps it's the fog or the silence of the redwood forests, but the town has long inspired horror, from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* to the 1987 vampire teen cult classic *The Lost Boys*.

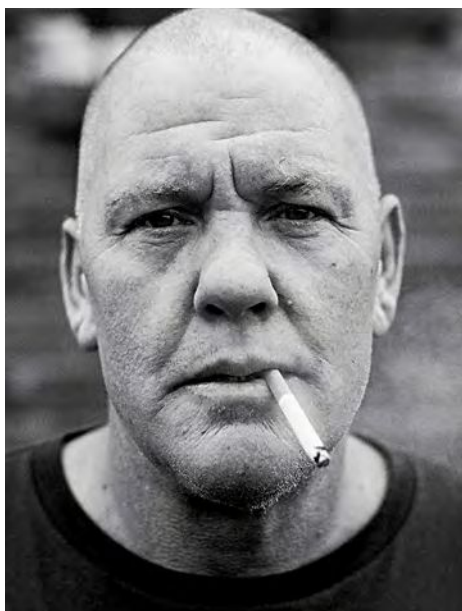
From his bedroom, Collier could see the lighthouse that kept watch over Steamer Lane, a surf spot where locals hunted for waves in packs. Surfing the Lane required following a strict pecking order. Those who stepped out of line often found themselves the victims of violence. One day Collier rode a wave he wasn't supposed to, and an older surfer tore his new wet suit. Collier hated being bullied on his home turf. He retrieved a baseball bat from his garage, and when the surfer came up from the water, Collier hurled the bat at his head, sending the man tumbling back down the cliff.

The bat incident became Santa Cruz lore, marking the moment Vince Collier established himself as the alpha male of Steamer Lane. At

the time, though, Collier was scared to death. He had nearly killed a man and didn't know what kind of retribution that would bring. Collier sought out Joey Thomas, a respected surfer and surfboard shaper who, after arriving in Santa Cruz in the late 1960s, quickly realized he needed to learn martial arts. But Collier was going to need more than a friend with a black belt; if he really wanted protection, Thomas told him, he should go up the mountain to see a man who went by the name of Jeff Ayers.

Ayers was known around town as a biker, someone who operated on the periphery of the scene. The few surfers who knew Ayers describe him as a megalomaniacal charlatan, a chameleon with a closet full of interchangeable costumes—carpenter, fisherman, businessman—that fit his various purposes. He looked like a cross between Jack Lemmon and Jack Nicholson and had charisma that could "direct traffic."

"Everybody feared Ayers," says Anthony Ruffo, a former pro surfer who is a few years younger than Collier. "He was fucking crazy."



Darryl "Flea" Virostko, Vince Collier and Anthony Ruffo, survivors of the Santa Cruz surf scene.



Collier and Thomas went up the hill to meet Ayers at his ranch compound north of Capitola. As they approached, stepping through a cluster of cars and motorcycles, Ayers's dog rushed Collier and bit his leg, drawing blood. Ayers laughed.

"I want you to go up to my house," Ayers said.

Collier scowled.

"You better go up there," Collier remembers Thomas telling him. "He's going to help you out."

In Ayers's house, Collier found many things to impress an aggressive teenager's fitful imagination: gym equipment, guns, drugs. Ayers gave Collier marijuana and hash to smoke and sell, and taught him how to fight, shoot guns and clean and assemble weapons blindfolded. In the middle of the night he took the teenage surfer out into the bay, where mysterious schooners emerged from the thick fog, swung their davits out over the deck and dropped 150- to 200-pound bales of Thai weed. Ayers and Collier packed the marijuana into ice chests and covered it with store-bought salmon.

Starting in the 1970s, Santa Cruz's reputation as a sleepy, isolated port with limited Coast Guard activity made it a hotbed for drug smuggling. Locals hid marijuana fields in the redwood forests and opened surf shops to launder their income. Occasionally, marijuana ditched from smugglers' ships would wash ashore like kelp. Collier soon learned that Ayers ran drugs and guns and had friends in Mexican gangs as well as in the California Highway Patrol.

The other surfers at the Lane grew to fear Collier. He could now surf any wave he wanted. With his square, bulky body, Collier wasn't built like a surfer, but he attacked waves like a bull. Along with his unlikely best friend, Richard Schmidt, a quiet and mild-mannered surfer with a distinctive bushy blond mustache, Collier became known as one of the best surfers in Santa Cruz. His first sponsorship came in the form of a suitcase filled with \$30,000 in cash, given to him by the owner of a west-side surf shop that was a front for a marijuana-growing operation. Collier traveled to competitions and eventually made the pro circuit. In Hawaii, Schmidt's smooth style at Sunset Beach and Collier's penchant for beating on Australians who tried to surf their spots endeared the Santa Cruz surfers to the North Shore locals.

Back home, Ayers pulled Collier in deeper, taking him into the woods, where they tied indebted clients to trees and beat and branded them. Ayers would also tie up Collier, pour

fish guts over his bare chest while laughing and then cut him loose, sending Collier into a rage. He found out Ayers was slipping him steroids and noticed he collected books about mind control.

"I was like, Fuck, this guy is brainwashing me," Collier says.

Then one of Collier's friends blew his brains out while high on cocaine—the same cocaine Collier sold. It was the final straw. Collier sent Ruffo up the hill with a message: He was done. For the next four years, Collier was sure Ayers was going to kill him. Collier kept a shotgun tucked under the driver's seat of his truck and recoiled every time he heard a motorcycle engine.

"I had guns all over the place," Collier says. "I used to sit in my tub with a cigar and a shotgun. I thought I was Clint Eastwood."

Ayers never came. Time passed. Collier bought a house a few hundred yards from where he'd grown up on the west side of Santa Cruz. He turned the garage into a small shaping room so he could earn money making

surfboards like Joey Thomas. He got married and tried to settle down.

...

In the 1980s, long before Santa Cruz became a bedroom community for Silicon Valley millionaires, it was still a hard-nosed town of second- and third-generation immigrant kids, Italian fishing families, Mexican and Filipino migrant workers and surf-obsessed residents. One local surfer, Richard Novak, took the town's rebellious and reckless image and used its name to brand a skateboard company that he co-founded. And yet, even though by the late 1980s "Santa Cruz" had become recognizable all over the world, the town was still considered the boonies by the southern California-centric surfing industry.

Collier lived on Dufour Street, a block of quaint bungalows on postage-stamp-size lots. He spent most of his days surfing a few blocks away at Steamer Lane. But when the waves weren't worth riding, he made surfboards in his garage, where the neighborhood groms (surfer slang for "kids") would pop in.



Ruffo, a former professional surfer, sold methamphetamine to supplement his sponsorship money.



Ruffo, Virostko and Collier in 2016.

Shawn Barron lived across the street. Everyone called him Barney, like a circus clown, and he fit the role: curly red hair, long pale face, freckles. Down at Steamer Lane, he was always doing flips and acting the fool. He made paintings that looked like bizarre alien dreamscapes and was chatty in a way that girls couldn't seem to get enough of. Sometimes Barney got lost in squirrely, pseudo-philosophic ramblings, the side effect of a manic depressive, bipolar brain that was kept under control with daily doses of lithium.

Darryl "Flea" Virostko lived up the block. He earned his nickname not just because he was small but also because he was tenacious and stubborn—he stuck to waves. "Small dick, big balls" is how his friends described him. Flea's balls could make him act like a real asshole. Once when they were kids, Flea and Barney were skateboarding outside Collier's house and Flea mouthed off to Collier's wife. Collier pinned Flea to the ground, held a lit cigarette to his face and threatened to burn his eyes out. Flea had heavy, serious eyes that flickered with wild hunger and reminded Collier a little of himself.

At the Lane, they called Collier "King." If a surfer stepped out of line, Collier broke the fins off the offender's surfboard or grabbed

his leash while he was on a wave. Sometimes the King had his horde of groms sit on the cliffs and toss rocks at unwitting surfers, shouting, "Valley go home"—a reference to interlopers from San Jose. The law of the Lane could be brutal and unforgiving, but to Santa Cruz's young surfers—many of whom came from modest means and broken homes and whose parents were fighting their own battles with drugs or alcohol—there was a certain comfort to be found in the rituals of tribal rigor.

In 1989, Collier took his wolf pack to Mexico, and they made a scene. They had never seen so many photographers on the beaches. Barney spent much of the trip cavorting with the lensmen—walking on his hands, attempting impossible tricks in the water. By the time they left, someone had snapped an image of Barney's goofy mug—mouth agape, eyes wide with wonder as he passed through the crystalline cascade of a translucent blue 10-foot barrel—that ended up on the cover of the September 1989 issue of *Surfer* magazine.

Barney's cover changed the way the young surfers thought about themselves and their pastime. Flea had started a surfing team with his dad at Santa Cruz High School, but what Barney did had nothing to do with

competition. Barney got on the cover of a surfing magazine by being Barney. They could do that. They could all flip and spin; they had off-the-wall, memorable nicknames. All they needed were the photographers.

"In high school, we figured it out," Flea says. "Once the magazines caught on to what we were doing, they were like, 'Who are these fucking kids?'"

They started earning as much as \$300 a month from sponsorships, which was enough to surf all day and drink all night if they slept on each other's couches and floors. And then, less than two years after Barney scored his first cover, Collier took the boys up the coast to a spot so far off the surfing industry's radar that a Half Moon Bay local named Jeff Clark had managed to ride it alone for 15 years before anyone took notice.

It's difficult to overstate how much Mavericks changed the sport. Its discovery opened a new era of big-wave hunting. Companies offered cash to those who rode the biggest waves of the year. These surfers invaded the popular imagination as daredevils who cheated death by harnessing the power of titanic waves. The gladiatorial stakes of big-wave surfing were cemented in 1994 when Hawaii-based Mark Foo, one of the world's best, died while



“WHEN YOU GOT A MAGAZINE COVER, WE’D CALL IT ‘COVER ACID’—THOSE GOOD, NATURAL ENDORPHINS. METH GIVES YOU THAT FEELING.”

surfing Mavericks for the first time. No one epitomized the sport’s newfound heroics more than Laird Hamilton, a Hawaii-reared, floppy-haired blond who came at the extreme sport with a stoic discipline, a rigorous diet and a herculean sense of purpose.

Then, in 1999, at the first Mavericks competition, Flea showed up with newly bleached, leopard-spotted hair. He took suicidal drops off the sharpest peaks of the day’s biggest waves—and won. To celebrate, the boys rented rooms at the Dream Inn near the Santa Cruz Wharf, carried the furniture to the beach and lit it all on fire. Collier took so much acid he got lost in the hotel for three hours. When the police showed up and discovered it was only local boys celebrating the biggest win in professional surfing, they turned a blind eye.

Seeing Flea surf at Mavericks was enthralling, almost horrifying, like watching an auto accident in slow motion. He didn’t so much harness the power of nature as he seemed to put himself at the mercy of nature’s indifference. Unlike a lot of surfers, Flea doesn’t talk about big waves with transcendent pretension. For him, the thrill was simple. When Mavericks was breaking, Flea would spend hours in the water, suffering brutal wipeouts and asphyxiating hold-downs. As his arms turned to rubber, his mind pleaded to return to shore.

“You’ll surf for three, four hours and you’ll think, Oh my God, I’ve got to get the fuck out of here,” Flea says. “And then you kick out of another wave and think, I want a-fucking-nother one. You’re psyched. You have so much adrenaline. The energy is so high it’s crazy. Adrenaline is the strongest thing in life.”

After Mavericks, Santa Cruz was swimming in sponsorship money. Jason “Ratboy” Collins, another young Santa Cruz surfer, landed a 360-degree spin during a demonstration at the Lane that almost single-handedly introduced aerial tricks to the pro circuit. Santa Cruz surfers traveled the world in packs. They got into brawls in South Africa, raised hell at trade shows in Vegas. Flea won three Mavericks championships in a row. In a 2002 article, *Vanity Fair* dubbed him “the Tommy Lee of surfing.” When asked about his workout routine, Flea told the magazine he “beat off a lot.”

At his height, Flea was raking in \$12,000 a

month, cruising by Steamer Lane in a convertible Chevy Impala with a chain-link steering wheel and hydraulic suspension.

...

“When Santa Cruz guys did good,” Anthony Ruffo says, “we all did good.”

By 2000, it felt as though every surfer in Santa Cruz was making a living at the sport. Even the older guys like Ruffo earned enough sponsorship money to get by. But then the surfing industry began to change. Companies stopped throwing as much money around, and almost overnight Ruffo’s sponsorships dried up. He was in his late 30s, and the only thing he had ever done with his life besides surf was work at a bakery—and sell weed. So Ruffo started selling a new drug to make ends meet: methamphetamine.

In the mid-2000s meth hit California hard. By 2005 the state had experienced a 100 percent increase in meth-related arrests. Santa Cruz surfers became poster children of the epidemic. Young surfers were afraid to walk by the Lane. When pro surfer Nat Young was growing

up, his mother drove him to the beach rather than risk having him walk the few blocks from the cliffs. It was rumored that meth was being used as a big-wave performance enhancer. More common were stories of strung-out big-wave surfers: a paranoid Peter Mel on the roof of his house, trying to disconnect the telephone wires; Jeff Spencer losing his home and living like a lost boy in the caves by the beach. In 2007, a surfer from Monterey named Peter Davi—who had been surfing another new big-wave spot called Ghost Tree with Ruffo—was found floating facedown in a kelp bed. Davi’s drowning shocked Santa Cruz. He was a family man, not one of the Steamer Lane wild men. Nevertheless, the coroner’s report found meth in his blood.

Ruffo says meth’s appeal was that it offered so much more than a rush. When he smoked meth, he felt good about himself—he felt like he did when he won the 1985 O’Neill Coldwater Classic or when he opened a surf magazine and saw his image frozen on a wave, framed by a crescent of whitewater spray.



“I looked up to him,” Ruffo says of Collier, pictured here. “He didn’t fuck around.”



Left: Virostko and Ruffo in the water. Right: Virostko won three Mavericks championships in a row before meth ended his career. Today, he runs a sports-based rehab program.

“We’d call it ‘winning acid,’ or when you got a cover, we’d call it ‘cover acid’—those good, natural endorphins,” Ruffo says. “What meth does is give you that feeling.”

Perhaps no one was more publicly ravaged by meth than Flea. It got to where he took so many beatings at Mavericks, his friends feared every wave would be his last. At the 2008 Mavericks competition, Flea showed up late for his heat, took two disastrous wipeouts, landed the biggest wave of the day and then disappeared for the remainder of the tournament. Later that same year, exhausted and dehydrated, he fell backward off a cliff at Davenport, north of Santa Cruz. He was airlifted to a hospital in Santa Clara. When he was released, he headed up the coast to find Vince Collier.

Flea’s body was too broken to surf. He didn’t know how long it would be until he could feel Mavericks again. At Collier’s place in northern California, all Flea could do was lie around. Why hadn’t he died when he fell off the cliff? It seemed as though everyone else around him died. His uncle, whom he idolized, had recently passed away. The day he won his first Mavericks competition, his friend died of a brain aneurysm. Another friend died of cancer the following year. When Peter Davi died, Flea had to break the news to Davi’s son. And yet there he was, broken and bruised but not

dead. He could think of a dozen times when he should have been killed. Once, his leash got stuck in the rocky reef at Mavericks and he took wave after wave on the head. That day, it felt like the only way he wouldn’t drown was if he found the strength to do a sit-up with a mountain pressing on his chest. And yet, his leash broke. He didn’t die.

Holed up at Collier’s, all Flea could think about was drinking and smoking meth. When he was finally able to surf again, he didn’t. Instead, he combed the beaches of Santa Cruz and bought cases of spray paint at hardware stores. Flea’s sunken, scabby face haunted the town. He was a pariah, a cautionary tale. His house, once the surf scene’s social center, became a hoarder’s den and a flophouse for meth-heads. Uncashed sponsors’ checks lay buried beneath piles of spray-painted driftwood.

Having watched Flea waste away for more than two years, his family and friends organized an intervention. Richard Schmidt counseled him to go to rehab; Joey Thomas threatened to break his legs if he didn’t. Afterward, Flea purchased two gallons of vodka and a massive bag of meth. Two weeks later, in August 2008, he showed up at Beacon House drug rehab center in Monterey County and blew 0.28 into the Breathalyzer, slightly below the threshold for an alcohol-induced coma.

Since walking into rehab that day, Flea hasn’t taken a single drink or drug. But by the time he got out, he had lost his house, his sponsors and his career. A friend helped him find a janitorial job at an apartment complex over the hill in Silicon Valley. He made coffee each week at his Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Other surfers have survived meth and rebuilt their careers. But now that Flea has sobered up, he feels burned by surfing. He takes responsibility for his addiction, but he also feels the industry turned a blind eye when he was spiraling out of control. When he most needed support, surfing dumped him.

“When they’re using your likeness and making all the money, they’re all for it,” Flea says. “But when I said, ‘Hey, I have a drug problem,’ it wasn’t like, ‘We want to send you to rehab—you’ve done all this for us, and we want you to get help.’ They just went, ‘See you later.’”

In 2012 Flea announced his retirement from big-wave surfing, and in 2014 he opened FleaHab, a sober-living environment that uses surfing and other sports as a way to help kick addiction. Flea started volunteering with Barney at an organization called Operation Surf, which teaches the sport to wounded veterans. He says he identifies with the way the vets talk about combat, about the terrible adrenaline rush you feel when people are trying to kill



you and how hard it is to adjust to life when they're not.

Like Flea, Barney soured on pro surfing. After the sports-apparel company Volcom dropped him from its surf team, Barney could be seen down at the Lane, shouting at another surfer they'd all grown up with, Ken "Skindog" Collins, who worked as a Volcom sales rep. Barney began to focus on his art. He made paintings for all his friends. When Ruffo was convicted of selling meth and sent to jail, Barney painted a tongue-in-cheek portrait of the older surfer behind bars. Anthony Tashnick, a pro surfer who lived with Barney for a while, remembers coming home in the evenings and finding him standing in his garage, painting, still in his wet suit.

On May 5, 2015, Barney collapsed and died in his home on Dufour Street. He was 44. A memorial video produced by Volcom attributes his death to a genetic condition he shared with his grandfather. However, the Santa Cruz County coroner reported that Barney's death was caused by "a rupture in his heart facilitated by methamphetamine use."

...

On a rainy Friday morning in April, I meet Flea at FleaHab, situated in a small two-story house in a quiet neighborhood in central Santa Cruz. Most Fridays Flea takes his recovering addicts out surfing, but as the boys emerge for coffee, he encourages them to use the rainy day to work on job applications or run errands.

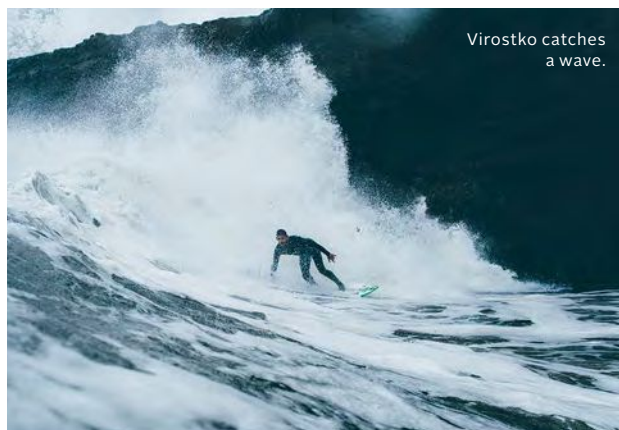
After Barney's death, Flea told a local paper that he wished no one had found out about his friend's drug use. Barney wasn't a heavy user. He had mental-health issues and had been medicated in one form or another his entire life. His mother had recently passed away. Even when drugs are part of the equation, no one can really know what's going on inside another man's head.

"It's a shame the toxicology report outweighs everything," Flea says. "People go, 'He was a drug addict, and he died from drugs.' But you know these people, and they're such good people."

By many accounts, there has never been a person in Santa Cruz quite as beloved as Barney. After his death, hundreds of people showed up at Steamer Lane for a memorial service in the water, more than had paddled

out for Jay Moriarity, the much-loved surfer whose life was commemorated in the film *Chasing Mavericks*. The mayor declared May 5 "Barney Day." During a tribute on a local radio show, friends spoke of his generosity and genuineness and told stories of his wild, inspiring surfing; his clownish, violence-defusing antics; his affection for the kids with cystic fibrosis whom he taught to surf; his unhinged mind, which was both a crutch and a source of his particular artistic genius. And they told the story of Barney the miracle worker. On the

FLEA'S HOUSE, ONCE THE SCENE'S SOCIAL CENTER, BECAME A FLOPHOUSE FOR METH-HEADS.



Virostko catches
a wave.

day his friends paddled out at Stockton Avenue to spread Barney's ashes in the ocean, they found marijuana buds floating in the breakers.

"We called it Barney's weed," Ruffo says. "Barney did it."

On the one-year anniversary of Barney's death, the old crew is gathered at Steamer Lane. *Trophy Man*, a sculpture Barney made by stringing his surfing trophies together in the shape of a humanoid, sits on the grass by the parking lot. The barbecues are out. Flea chats with Ratboy while sipping a non-alcoholic beer.

Ruffo is in his standard out-of-water garb: boardshorts, flat-brimmed ball cap, wrap-around sunglasses and a tank top that reveals a toned, tanned body and tattoos—an homage to the Hawaiian princes who first surfed Santa Cruz on his back, the name "Peter Davi" written in script across his forearm. He says this is the real Santa Cruz, the community, the sense of brotherhood, the fact that all these guys grew up together, climbed mountains together, fell down together, and yet they're still here for each other. The drugs, the wild stories, the deaths—sure, that all happened. But Santa Cruz has always been a crazy place, Ruffo says, going back to the days when Spanish soldiers lassoed grizzlies in the mountains and dragged them back to town to fight their strongest bulls.

"That spirit hangs around," he says.

I ask Ruffo what happened to Jeff Ayers. He's not sure—he disappeared, was never arrested.

"When I saw him last, a few years ago, he looked like an old man," Ruffo says. "He was a portion of the man he used to be. I was like, 'That's the guy you used to fear?'"

Later, Flea takes us in his truck down the coast to Capitola to pay a visit to Collier. In recent years, Collier's health has been in decline, and a degenerative eye disease is slowly blinding him. But we arrive to find the boisterous, bombastic legend. We talk about Ayers, the early days at the Lane, the brawls with Hawaiians and Australians at Bells Beach. Collier seems to enjoy rehashing the war stories. He says he's working on a memoir. He doesn't get out in the water much anymore; it's difficult with his eyesight. But he still paddles out on occasion, the old blind

King making his way back into the lineup at Steamer Lane. These days, though, he mostly sits on his board, feeling the rise and fall of each passing swell, listening to the shouts of the surfers and the cries of the gulls and seals in the distance.

"People are like, 'Why are you not going?'" Collier says. "And I'm like, 'You know what, man, I've caught a lot of fucking waves. Be glad I'm not taking every wave now, because you wouldn't be out here.'"

Collier roars with laughter and flashes a smile at Flea. ■



PLAYMATE

Bridget Malcolm

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON LEE PARRY

Before the ball drops on New Year's Eve, get a jump start on your list of resolutions by acquainting yourself with Miss January **Bridget Malcolm**. A trained oboist from Australia who favors Tchaikovsky, Strauss and Mahler, Bridget will inspire anyone who has resolved to learn a new instrument or explore a new career path this year. "I play most days," says Bridget, who splits her time between New York City and Los Angeles. "My dream is to transition into being a working classical musician." She's also the perfect motivation for those hoping to improve their eating habits—she's been a vegan for two years and spends her nights cooking at home, munching on cherry tomatoes (her favorite snack) and sharing healthy-living tips on her website, BridgetMalcolm.com.au. Pursuing her best self is always top-of-mind. "My pictorial is lighthearted and celebratory," she says. "I want to remind people to live each moment in 2017. You don't want to wake up one day and regret having never truly lived."





















BRIDGET MALCOLM



AGE: 25 **BIRTHPLACE:** South Fremantle, Australia **CURRENT CITY:** New York

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION EVERYONE CAN MAKE

How about 365 days of meditation? If you want to try it, just freaking do it. Everyone has a million reasons why they think it wouldn't work for them, but mindfulness is a key to stress management and all-around happiness. It lets me know when I need to pay more attention to my health. Dedicate just 10 minutes a day to meditating; it could change your life.

GOODIES PAST AND PRESENT

I miss eating Caramello Koalas, which are chocolate bars available only in Australia. It's my favorite non-vegan food. But if you can nail making a vegan Thai curry, you nail life in my eyes.

MY ULTIMATE PLAYLIST

Fleetwood Mac will always be my most-played artist, and listening to the Red Hot Chili Peppers is a guilty pleasure. But it was a Kinks song, "This Time Tomorrow," that really altered how I think about the world. It's about sitting on a plane, wondering where you'll be the same time tomorrow. For me, the song pulls into focus the need to live every moment because tomorrow is unknown. When it comes, does anyone want to look back and realize they've spent the past 24 hours being sad?

FEAR FACTOR

Performing music in front of a live audience will always be scarier

than walking down a runway. That's because you're putting every ounce of your soul on the line for people and praying your technique can support it. It's terrifying—but a thrill when you nail it!

WHAT'S ON MY DVR

I've watched about 10 minutes of reality TV in my life. It stresses me out; I'm not a fan. Tina Fey, however, is the funniest human being out there. I look up to her and the way she treats other women in entertainment. She's definitely a role model.

THE ONLY DIET TIP YOU NEED

Food is not about having "cheat days" and restrictions. It's about living and enjoying yourself.

@bridgetmalcolm @BridgetMalcolm





FIN

FINISH

BY **WALTER KIRN**

*A tale of robots,
sex and ice cream*





FICTION

Serving ice cream to sunburned young families was the first job that Tyson Millner lost to a machine. It was shaped like a fat, upright lobster, and had five arms. It was there one morning behind the counter, illuminated by a special track light, when he showed up for his shift. Mrs. Huggard, his boss, the shop's owner, called it "Lenny" after a character in a book she loved. It had some remarkable abilities. It could guess people's orders before they placed them based on what they'd ordered in the past and was programmed to tease them with corny quips. If a girl liked pecans on her sundaes, it might say, retrieving her name from its perfect memory, "You're nuts for nuts, Luanne!" Or, if she wanted bananas, "You've gone bananas!" These wisecracks never failed to bring on squeals, even from children who'd heard them many times.

Also thrilling to them was Lenny's physical manner, which was that of an overburdened juggler continually on the verge of flubbing up. Simulating rising panic, its articulated, claw-tipped arms would speed up crazily, threatening disaster, as they dispensed candy sprinkles and caramel sauce, blended milk shakes and built top-heavy cones that it pretended were too tall to hold and yet, despite much mock bobbling, never dropped.

Tyson too found Lenny charming—at first. They were partners, the way he saw it, a comic duo. He helped with tasks that Lenny couldn't manage, such as clearing clogged syrup spouts, handling paper money (Lenny could only process cards) and topping off sundaes with a glossy cherry perched on a frilly squirt of canned whipped cream. This cherry business, with Tyson at the ready, suspending the piece of fruit above the bowl as fake-fumbling Lenny assembled the confection, grew into their most popular routine. Another act that delighted the little ones consisted of Tyson standing at Lenny's "shoulder" watching his movements and wielding a small wrench as though prepared to swoop in and readjust him, or maybe deactivate him, should he screw up. But Lenny never screwed up. In fact, he kept improving, endowed by his manufacturer with the ability to observe and refine his own behavior. Someday he might even learn to place a cherry, dimpling it into the cream so it stayed put.

Within a few weeks of Lenny's installation, traffic at the shop had nearly doubled, and Tyson decided to ask a second time for the raise he'd been expecting. His wage, he'd understood when he was hired, was preliminary, probationary, and supposed to go up automatically after a month or two. When this didn't happen, Tyson started grouching about unforeseen expenses in his life, from the need to



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replace the bald tires on his truck to a surge in the price of Clarifex, a drug that calmed his raging acne. Mrs. Huggard responded with grumbles of her own. A pack rat had died in a drainpipe in the wall of the apartment building she owned next door, causing a leak that soaked into the Sheetrock and spawned a bloom of toxic mold. She had to hire a licensed abatement firm at over \$150 an hour. But even worse, she let him know, tourism was down throughout the region thanks to hysterical media reports concerning a rare but deadly tick-borne virus local to southern Utah's red rock hills. Sensitive to her troubles, Tyson backed off, but when Lenny appeared and worked his miracle, attracting new customers from throughout the area even as fall approached and the weather cooled, he decided his demands were not unreasonable.

He approached his boss in her office behind the shop at the end of a Thursday, the day she did her books. Surrounded by her collection of witty mugs—*Same Old Shit, Different Day*, *The Best Man for the Job Is Usually a Woman*, etc.—she was filling out a spreadsheet on her computer. Mrs. Huggard had a bitter streak. The rumor was she'd been the longtime mistress of a married U.S. congressman who'd found religion during a close election and bought her silence with a large lump sum that she'd used to start the shop. To Tyson, she looked like a loving soul defeated, a merry spirit curdled by worldly hurts. Her gray-green eyes were permanently narrowed and her hair was a perfect blonde fury, set and sprayed, rigid enough to cage a little bird. She lived in the top rear unit of her building, where Tyson had once helped a mover deliver a dryer. Her furniture was brown leather, like a man's, and through the open doorway of her bedroom he glimpsed an old poster of a movie cowboy blasting away with a lever-action rifle. The only touch of softness in the place was an odd little altar on a window seat consisting of candles and amethysts and sage leaves arranged in a crescent

around a bright gold coin. "Prosperity magic," she answered when he asked. "The sun streams in and activates a vortex."

Tyson stood by her desk and made his pitch while she leaned back in her new hydraulic chair, her elbows resting on its arms and her fingertips in a steeple under her chin. He reminded her of the promises she made when she hired him off an online bulletin board maintained by a state-run service for at-risk teens. Youth Horizons, a boot-camp-like program in the desert that he'd been sentenced to by a lady judge after calling in a bomb threat to his school on a day when he couldn't bear for his few friends to see the volcanic pimples on his face, was the cruelest summer of his life. On the very first night a camp mate snatched his Ritalin, forcing him to undergo withdrawal while enduring a cycle of freezing predawn showers, barefoot five-mile runs, marathon computer-coding classes and trust-building leaps from a tower behind the barracks into other campers' outstretched arms. The counselors told them the idea was to break them down and then rebuild them, but the program ended before phase two was done.

"You told me you'd bump me up after a month," he said. "I just had to prove to you I didn't steal. Well, I didn't. I haven't."

"You're reformed."

"I'm honest and punctual, is what I am."

"Not to mention immaculately groomed."

Tyson's right hand floated up and touched his forehead, a reflex when someone mentioned his appearance.

"Don't pick," she said. "It won't heal if you keep picking. And that would be a shame, because you're handsome. Fundamentally. Under all the rough stuff."

Tyson had been consoled this way before, mostly by church girls, those experts at snaky praise. Their compliments, if you took them in, settled inside your system like spoiled food, producing pangs and churns and aches. It was better to be called ugly and bleed cleanly. That

could be bandaged, dealt with by first aid.

Tyson pressed ahead. In case Mrs. Huggard hadn't listened last time, he described his circumstances to her. His landlord, his aunt, was on mobile dialysis, with no other income besides the rent he paid her. As a Mormon, one tenth of his income was the Church's. Most important, though, he was the sole responsible male in the life of a young single mother, his cousin Kylee, whose three-year-old son had developmental challenges that called for psychology checkups in Salt Lake City and kept her from working outside the home. He didn't support his cousin—she got church welfare—but his occasional loans and gifts bridged her worst shortfalls and wardrobe needs, letting her focus on being a good mom.

"That's all deeply stirring," Mrs. Huggard said, "but your pay should reflect your performance, not your problems. The truth is, it's Lenny who deserves a raise."

"He can't even put the cherries on," said Tyson.

"Maybe we don't need cherries. Do people eat them?"

"They're the finishing touch. They're traditional."

"They're wasteful. Nobody eats them. I see them in the trash."

"They're expected," said Tyson.

"They're barbershop quartets. Used to seem cheerful. No one quite knows why."

Before Tyson could argue his point further, Mrs. Huggard cut his schedule. She informed him that the shop would close on Mondays so Lenny could be serviced, tuned and cleaned by the company she leased him from. She suggested that Tyson, if he were "future positive," might want to learn to perform such work himself. She offered to ask the company's mobile tech team, which was based in Las Vegas and worked out of a van equipped with costly electronic tools, to let him stop in and observe its work on Mondays. He could think of it as an unpaid internship.

The authorities were perhaps still angry about the stir he'd caused by making a bomb threat.



"I don't think so. No interest," said Tyson. He loathed computers. He even disliked his phone. Youth Horizons had drilled him in a gospel of tripling and quadrupling opportunities for anyone able to size a digital photo or group all his passwords under one super-password, but then why were the people who taught these skills so grim? Why were they herding delinquents through the desert, not cruising eight miles above it wearing headphones? And this was the sick part: According to one counselor, the day was approaching when most computer work would be performed by other computers. Then what? It's why when Kylee felt all cooped up that one time and begged him to pay for an online graphic design course, he bought her a stationary bike instead.

"I ought to go back and close up and clear the till," he said. "I left him all alone in there."

Mrs. Huggard raised an index finger as if inviting him to witness something. She swiveled around in her chair and tapped her keyboard, calling up a screen on her big desktop that showed a split view from the security cameras: the front door on the right, the counter on the left. The door had been shut, its latching cross-bar lowered and its one-way reflective sun-curtain pulled down. But that was not the sight that startled Tyson. Standing at the counter near the cash drawer and casting a crisp dark shadow on the white tiles, Lenny was rapidly counting the day's take and stacking the bills and coins with all five claws.

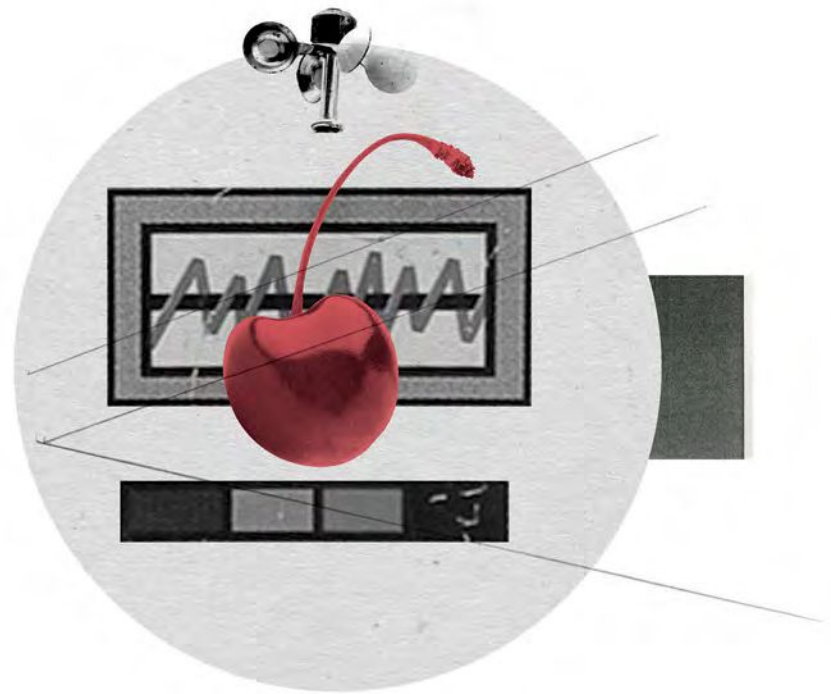
"You know how he mastered that?" Mrs. Huggard said.

Tyson didn't, and wasn't about to guess.

"By patient observation. By watching you."

...

He fasted on Sunday. He fasted once a month on the schedule set down by the Church, the chief source of structure in his life since Youth Horizons had broken him down and only partially rebuilt him. His Mormon faith confused him for the most part, particularly its ideas about the afterlife, when risen souls would inherit their own planets and reign over them as God reigns over ours, but there was one doctrine that made sense to him: pre-existence. Before we were born, according to this teaching, we chose our lives to come, from the people who would become our friends and families to the most crucial challenges we'd face. That's why no problems on earth were insurmountable; we'd already solved them in our prior state. The trick was retrieving these answers through the veil, which was where fasting came in. It quickened thought.



Like most businesses in Cedar City, the ice cream shop was closed on Sundays, but Tyson felt prompted to drive there after church on his way to Kylee's place, where he'd promised to watch his nephew while she cleaned. He parked his truck across the street and watched the sunshine baste the wide front window. He pictured Lenny locked in the back room, shrouded in the bluish plastic sheet that shielded him from dust. Tyson wished he could spend some time alone with him, if only so they could banter about nothing using the goofy scripts in Lenny's memory. "Oh fudge, we're out of chocolate!" "Willya grab some vanilla from the chilla?" At work, with Mrs. Huggard spying on them through the security portal on her desktop, they only pretended to have fun, but underneath the mood was pressured, tense. It led to mistakes, at least on Tyson's part. Just yesterday he'd dumped a tall parfait that Lenny had spent five minutes layering, bringing tears to the eyes of a patient birthday girl, who turned to her father and wailed, "My special treat!" Lenny promptly started a new parfait, but when it came time to hand it off to Tyson so he could light the pink candle on the top while singing "Happy Birthday," her father barged in and grabbed it straight from Lenny.

As Tyson sat parked in his truck he saw a cop car nose out of an alley onto Smith Street and turn in his direction, moving slowly. He recognized the officer, a man who'd given him trouble in the past, pulling him over for nothing, just to "chat," no doubt aware of Tyson's tainted status as a level-six offender. Though his stint at Youth Horizons had automatically

wiped his record when he'd turned 18 last winter, the authorities seemed determined to toy with him, perhaps still angry about the stir he'd caused by making the bomb threat in a foreign accent. They tracked him to his aunt's within 10 minutes, panicking neighbors up and down the block by thundering in in an armored SUV, wearing black paramilitary-style jumpsuits and brandishing laser-scoped long guns, not stubby sidearms. His aunt, unaware of the sneaky call he'd placed, was docked with her mobile dialysis machine when the killer elite burst through the door. She fainted in her lounge chair. Tyson, wrapped in a towel, fresh from the shower, was handcuffed in minus seven seconds, his shoulders cranked back in their sockets, about to pop. Worse, the towel had fallen to his ankles and the commotion had made his penis hard, a condition he tried to will away but couldn't.

Finding work after all of that had not been simple. He didn't want to have to search again.

The police car rolled past and Tyson drove away, obeying the speed limit, signaling his turns. He entered Kylee's subdivision, a hive of noodle-shaped streets and cul-de-sacs lined by desert-tan three-story houses whose residents couldn't cover their basic monthlies, forcing a lot of them to rent rooms to strangers. Kylee lived in a basement whose owner had set it up as a huge media room originally, with sectional sofas and a vast TV that covered one wall like a window into hell. Tyson found her there watching a movie with little Taylor, who was standing enclosed in a waist-high plastic cart that scooted around on gritty, scratchy wheels and featured various toys on



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springy stalks, including a dangling yellow microphone. The gadget worked. It amplified his voice, filling the room with booming babbles that Kylee, a nervous type, guiltily interpreted as orders.

"I'm getting your Cheerios. Promise. Hang on," she said.

Tyson said, "Go do your laundry. Let me have him." His theory of Taylor was that his talk was nonsense, just bubbles of sound-feeling bursting in the air, meaning Kylee was scrambling his progress toward working speech by attaching specific rewards to random blabs.

"He's trying to tell us he wants a snack," said Kylee.

"He's got a snack. What's that?" Tyson pointed to the gray bologna strips strewn on a tray that clipped onto the cart. "He's fine. Do your wash. We're going to read a book."

"He tore all the pages out. He wrecked his book."

"Kids need multiple books. That's pathetic. One book? That's wrong."

"We live a sad life in our enormous basement."

"I'll make up a story for him. Go away." This was why he hadn't moved away to work in Salt Lake or Las Vegas, the way his friends had. There was a mind at stake. A tiny mind.

The story he told tumbled out already formed, a tale of deception and enchantment that must have been a product of his fast, since nothing about it seemed to come from him; he wondered if he'd seen it in a movie or had it read to him by a babysitter, perhaps that old

Basque lady who'd nursed his aunt. The setting was a gloomy mountain cavern, the throne room of a lonesome queen who'd plucked out her own eyes as a young maiden after glimpsing the man she loved passionately kissing her lovely sister. In her court were two elves that competed for her favor by fashioning elaborate jeweled crowns whose beauty the queen could only take on faith, by listening to the elves' descriptions of them. The cleverer elf, who was also the lazy one, eventually realized that the crowns themselves—whose brilliant gemstones could be obtained only by digging in a deep and narrow mine—were unimportant compared to the fine words required to rouse the queen's imagination. Instead of toiling in the far-off mine, he crafted his crowns from homely pebbles and fixed his attention on learning fancy speech. This trickery enraged the second elf. He responded by digging deeper into the mine in search of brighter, larger gems, which he described to the queen in honest terms, along with the splendid crowns he made from them. This contest went on for many years, the clever elf growing grander in his language, the simple elf weakening from his taxing labors. Finally, on her deathbed, the queen announced that her kingdom would pass to the greater of the two craftsmen, but rather than judge the matter herself, she would call upon her chief wizard, whose eyes were keen, to rank their workmanship. The simple elf rejoiced on hearing this, confident in his achievements, while the clever elf panicked and, fearing the wizard's approach, raised his

fists and beat the simple elf, who died in the battle, too weary to fight back.

"A curse on you," came the voice of the wise wizard, who'd witnessed the conflict while floating in the air. "You need not have slain the poor creature, for you, my elf, were truly the best jeweler. Your rival turned rubies into crowns, but you, with your tongue, turned gravel into rubies."

Tyson's nephew, hot and small and damp, had curled up against him and gone to sleep. Tyson realized he'd told the story with his eyes closed, bobbing along in a cloudy purple dreamscape. When he opened his eyes and reentered the hard world, he smelled a pizza baking, cheese and sausage, and a spike of pure animal hunger drenched his mouth. He could eat now; the fast had succeeded. He'd broken through. He knew what to do. Not precisely, not in detail, but as a direction, a course across a map.

"If you'd just asked me, dummy," Kylee said after he'd presented his ideas, "I would have told you the same thing. The way you describe this, it's your only move."

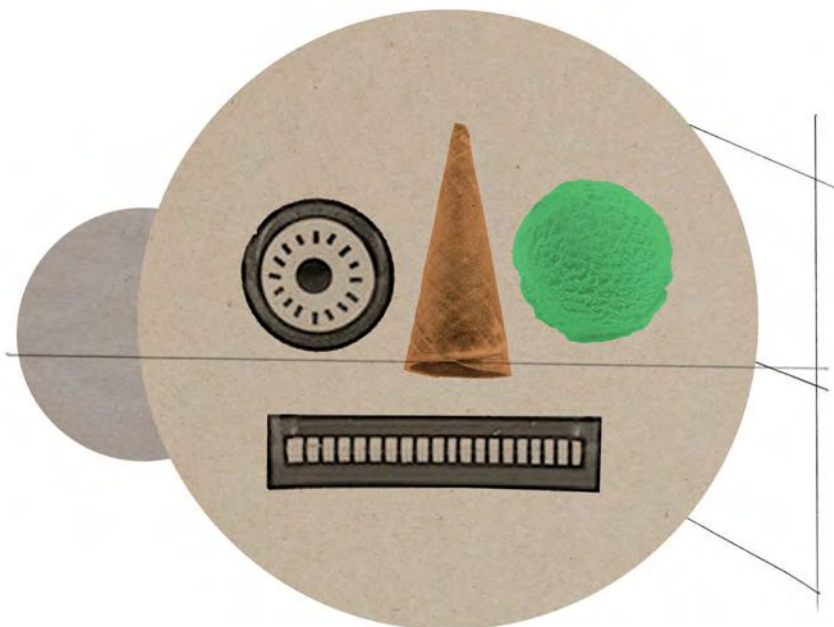
But a vision was so much better than advice.

...

According to the videos and websites that Tyson studied after work that week, gaining control of a woman, seducing her, had little to do with gentleness and kindness. Though women admired these qualities in theory, their real-life behavior, true pickup artists knew, revealed a preference for boastful, taunting jerks. Appearance? Attractiveness? Neither was essential. What mattered was keeping her doubtful and off-balance. What worked was leverage, and what was leverage? Fear.

Tyson's first move with Mrs. Huggard was to start calling her "Carol" around the shop. She didn't correct him, though he could see it rocked her; her hands went right to her body every time, smoothing her shirt or the hips of her brown slacks. The name seemed to put them on a different footing, elevating his and dropping hers, even, in some way, narrowing their age gap. She was 40, give or take a year. Tyson learned this by turning off the soft-rock radio station that played during work hours, per her standing order, and switching to an urban station. "They're depressing, those 1960s songs," he said. "All that high warbling makes me want to die. Sorry you had to grow up with that."

"I didn't. That last song—performed by the gifted Whitney Houston, if pop culture history interests you at all—was the number one hit in 1993, my senior year in high school."





It wasn't the words so much as the gazes, gestures and other hypnotic cues that led a woman to crave you.

"Back in some farm state, you told me. Indiana?"

"Go Hoosiers!" Lenny barked, idling off to the side near the steel sink. His updated customer-service software plug-in cross-referenced the names of states and cities with a list of pro and college sports teams. Tourists loved it. They couldn't get enough. They ran down long rosters of places, testing him.

"Minnesota," Mrs. Huggard said.

"Go Twins. Go Vikings."

"Question for you, Carol," Tyson said. "And I need you to answer honestly. And think." He was leaning against the freezer, ankles crossed, his thumbs hooked inside the cloth belt that cinched his apron. His shirtsleeves, which he'd always worn rolled down to hide the muddy amateur tattoo he'd given himself at Youth Horizons (Scorpio the scorpion, his sun sign, inside a ring of fire), were pushed up as far as they'd go, around his biceps. More skin showed inside his open collar, which also revealed a nickel chain formed from hammered, medieval-looking links. He'd bought it at a fair but never worn it, concerned that it might draw attention to the war zone of pitted pink scars on his throat and lower jaw. The pickup videos allayed this qualm. Concealing your flaws was a weak, evasive move that conveyed degraded mating status to the primal female brain. The power move, which required a rewiring of the shame-warped modern male nervous system, was to showcase your flaws, to stick them right up front.

"If I'm buying my girlfriend a hot new dress—on sale; that's important, a dress I can't take back—but I don't know her size and I don't want to ask her because asking would ruin the surprise, should I estimate down and risk buying one too small—if so, I've blown a ton of money; it might be a sale dress, but it's still not cheap—or, to be safe, do I buy a larger size?"

"Except you don't have a girlfriend," said Mrs. Huggard. "Or has that changed? It might explain some things."

"The question is purely hypothetical."

"Let's pray I caught it all. It stretched."

"I'll gladly repeat it."

"Hush. I'm concentrating."

"I'm hoping you're storing this, Lenny," Tyson said. "This might be your first true insight into Carol. That question I asked her, you're going to see, is like an X-ray of her personality." Tyson was improvising here, patching a crack in his routine. In the video lessons, the model pickup artist had a buddy, a so-called wingman, who pumped up his image and created drama. He might mention that they were late for a cool party, say, or whisper to the target woman that the pickup artist's desperate ex was lurking across the room.

"Too small," Mrs. Huggard said. She seemed distracted; she kept casting glances at the office door where she'd been headed when Tyson waylaid her. Or perhaps she was miffed that a mother with plump twin boys had paused at the window just then and peered inside—intently, with her hands shading her eyes—and then moved along in the way some parents did when they couldn't immediately spot the magical mechanized server they'd heard about.

"That tells me a lot about you. 'Too small,'" said Tyson, determined to play out the whole bit. It had taken him almost two hours to memorize because it called for different lines depending not only on the woman's answers but also on her posture and body language and whether she was alone or in a group. What's more, the script's potency wasn't in the words so much as in the gazes, gestures, breaths and other carefully planted hypnotic cues that led the woman, almost despite her will, to crave your attention and approval. Was it working with Carol? He'd soon see.

"What it tells me," he said, "is that you're vain. You worry about your looks, your weight, your shape. It also tells me you hope I like your shape. As my imaginary girlfriend, a role you unconsciously fell into there, you're eager for me, your imaginary boyfriend, to perceive you as slim and trim. You'd be crushed if I bought the larger size. You'd fear I thought that you

were fat, particularly if you are a little fat."

"Brief time-out. Excuse me. People keep peeking in, then walking off." Mrs. Huggard double-clapped her hands, the signal for Lenny's motor to engage. "Command. Reposition. Front window, center right." Lenny rolled toward his post with a high, thin, oiled purr. After a series of sensor-driven stutters and minute telescopic height adjustments, he stopped in a panel of sunlight and faced the street, his arms folded up at all three articulations, his claws retracted and fully sheathed.

"Go on. Your psychology test," said Mrs. Huggard. She opened her stance some and cocked her head—good signs.

"That's it. That's all," said Tyson. "Though I was thinking: After work some night, maybe I could stop by at your apartment? To talk or whatever. Maybe watch a movie. You probably have great cable. I don't have any."

"A movie? At my place?"

"Or maybe not. Whatever. It was just an idea." Error. Error. Once you'd leaned in, you didn't lean back. You either withdrew all interest, baffling her, or leaned in further, going for the close. His eyes floated down to his shoes, another lapse, then wandered over to Lenny, so still, so solemn. Between tasks, between customers, he barely existed. Sometimes it was hard to remember he was the enemy.

"We could do it tonight if you're free. And up to it." Mrs. Huggard had opened her stance up even further, and soon, if the models were correct, she would touch her neck or breastbone. There: the breastbone. Tyson felt rushed. They'd skipped a step somehow, he wasn't sure which one, but the websites were clear: He should square his shoulders now and slacken his mouth a bit.

"If my friend is in town, I'll grab a little dope." Elongated stage pause. "Said Carol."

"This just got interesting."

"It always was. You just never seemed to notice."

"Carol said to Tyson."

"Said Mr. Millner."



They sat on the bed beneath the cowboy poster, unzipping and unhooking. He wanted to thrill her.

...

The TV set, mounted on a wall, was small for this decade and miles from the couch, so they sat on a checked red blanket, picnic style, and watched the movie from the floor. She mixed cocktails in an empty saucepan and served them in mismatched stoneware mugs. He noticed her kitchen was pitifully equipped and that there was not a plant in the whole place, just a sand-filled clay flowerpot on a low bookcase with three foil pinwheels standing in the sand. She chain-smoked menthol cigarettes. The clouds she blew caught beams of blue TV light as she talked back to the movie, guessing characters' lines before they spoke them, ridiculing weak points in the plot and specifying the camera shots ("Zoom in," "Track back," "Fade out"). Her ashtray was a Coke can with Coke in it; lit butts inserted in the hole hissed and sizzled. She said money belonged in the bank, not in the house. She voted Republican, thought Democratic and lived Libertarian, she said, and then she explained what this meant; he didn't know politics. Their first physical contact was when she slapped his thigh, playfully but with stinging force, during a courtship scene she found absurd because the woman didn't seem to mind being pushed down by the man into a snowbank. He caught inklings of Mrs. Huggard, bursts of Carol and waves of a third being who contained them both and seemed to have whirled up out of a brass lamp. She wore gym shorts, a green, spangled blouse thing and no bra, her breasts bobbing like rubber bath toys. That she'd chosen to dwell and do business among Mormons made no sense to him, although maybe she lived for close getaways, quick-changes. She apologized for not finding any dope but said she'd brewed tea from cloves and magic mushrooms and spiked it with lemon vodka to make their drinks.

"So why this weird new you?" she said, asking him what he'd been meaning to ask her. "All shitty and cute and party with the boss?"

"I'm not sure I know. I'm 18. I try things out."

"When I was 18 things tried *me* out."

"Do you mean guys?"

"More like forces. Approaches. Ideas. Schools of thought." She drank some spiked tea and then peered into her cup as though she'd spotted a bug, a hair, her fortune. "You're right, though. They usually took the form of guys."

They sat. Nothing happened. They were just together. She poked a butt into the Coke can hole and up came a twisty braid of silver smoke that she blew on and separated into strands. It was possible that he loved her, or soon would. Her hair, with the spray gone, fell straight and smelled like pencils. He wanted to thrill her, suspecting few ever had. He didn't care about her thrilling him because calming down enough for that to happen seemed impossible tonight.

They sat on the bed beneath the cowboy poster, unzipping and unhooking. She took the lead but then he took it back, pushing her down. "You have instincts. Good," she said. He kneed her legs apart and used his hand on her, though possibly too scientifically at first, because she soon took control of it with her hand and moved it more crudely, with over twice the pressure, which made him feel rebuked. He bent down to kiss her but she turned her head, so he chewed on her ear. She seemed unmoved. She lifted his hand off and said, "We had a rhythm there but now it's like we're scrubbing a pot. Plan B." He interpreted this as a request to use his mouth, and indeed she reached behind his head and dug her nails into his scalp and drew him down. But not all the way down, as though she'd reconsidered or detected a need to use the bathroom first. He went ahead anyway. Progress. Her motions started. The energy rose for a minute but then it leveled, and then he felt it running off somewhere—water overflowing from a sink. Her hand left his head and he felt her body torque. Glancing up, he saw her stretch an arm out and reach behind some books stacked on her nightstand. He resumed his task.

He heard a whining noise, a high-speed

grinding. It was steady at first but then turned choppy, pulsing. Between his lips and the surface he imagined as a melting scoop of French vanilla, something rigid intruded. It thrummed and buzzed.

"Stay down there. Be partners. Work with it," she said. "This isn't either-or. I want you both."

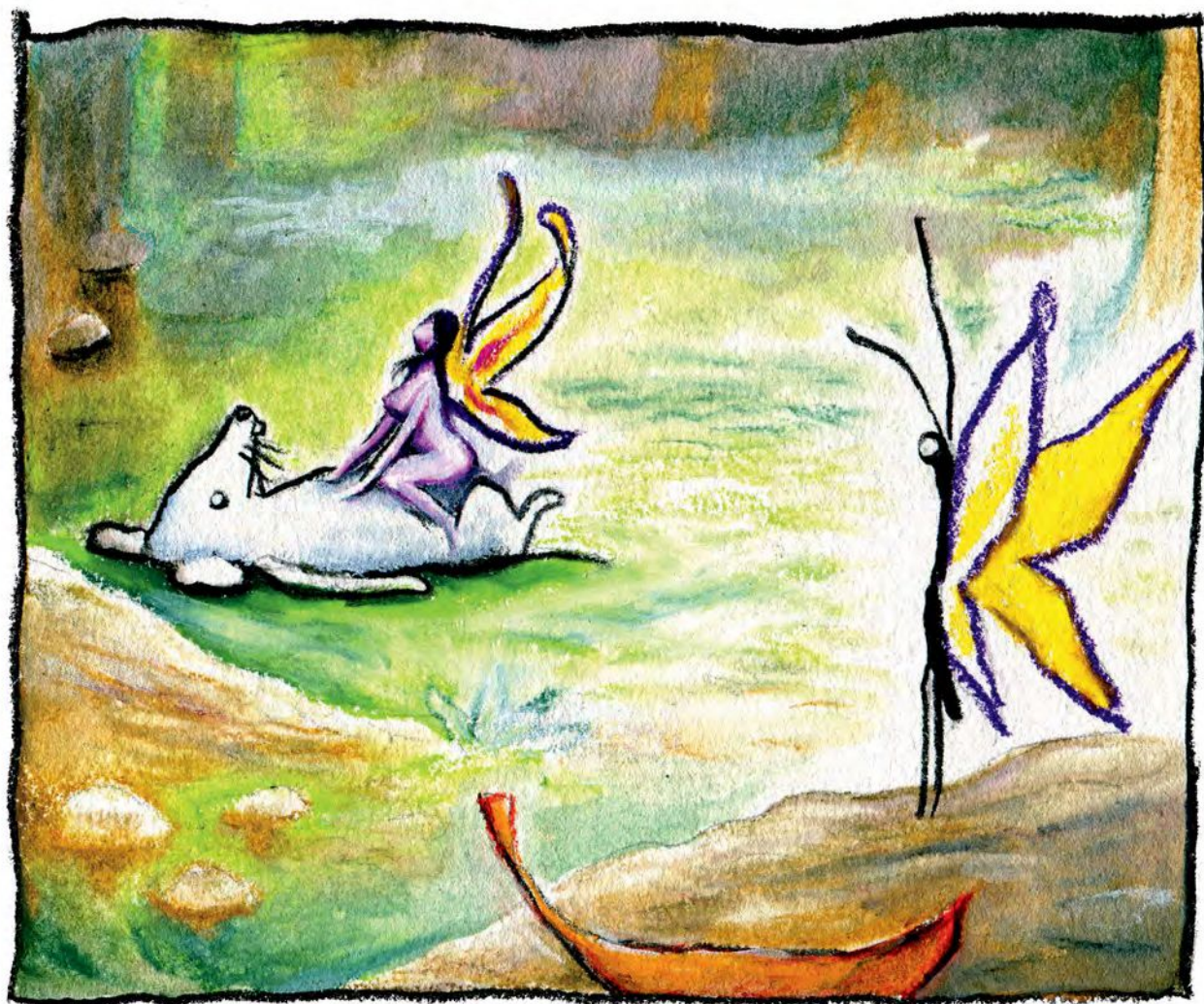
The device bumped his cheekbone, chattering his jaw. He moved his mouth aside to give it territory but it kept advancing and claiming more. Soon, the widening of time produced by the boozy mushroom tea became a scriptural chasm of agonies. Snapping to for a moment, he perceived that he was contributing nothing to the effort now—the locust invader had cast him to the side—yet she still seemed to want him down here, on her team. Teamwork. At Youth Horizons, it was everything. A man without a team, the program taught, was weak and doomed and to be pitied, but a young man alone was to be feared; he tended to grow into a menace. So get with it. Keep at it. Hum along. This droning misery can't go on forever. On Sunday mornings, certain hymns seemed endless, but then he'd turn the page and see that there was only one more verse. Knowing this, he sang more powerfully. Everyone did. They sang for their release.

...

"*I scream, you scream,*" chants Lenny to the kids, who chant along with him as he moves his arms. He learned this by copying the boy. Then the boy stopped doing it. This is also what happened with the bananas. Lenny could slice them crosswise from the start, but only the boy knew how to slice them lengthwise. Then one day Lenny did it: banana halves. The boy took his knife away and put it somewhere. Then the boy left too. Lenny began to practice with a smaller knife. He sliced bananas into halves, then he learned to slice them into thirds, and then to shave them thin: banana curls. He learned on his own, by himself, without his teacher.

"*We all scream for ice cream!*"

The cherry boy. ■



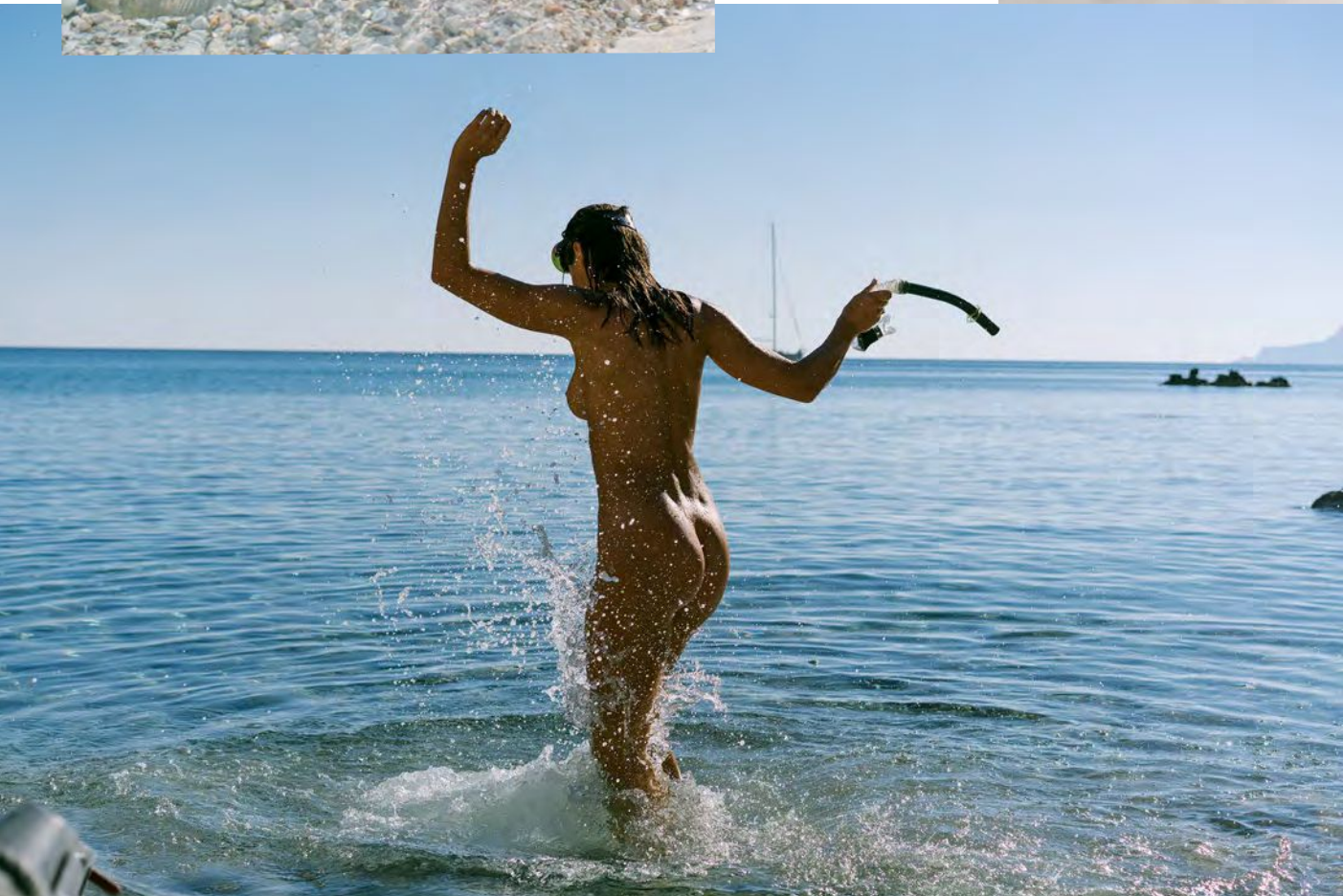


Greetings from **GREECE**

Miss October 2014 **Roxanna June** offers a peek into her travel diary as she explores the beautiful Mediterranean



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ALI MITTON**





Sept 29, 2016

This morning we
boat to Polya
my favorite spot
the trip. The l
secluded and
We swam in
and collected
bring home



So
Today
for
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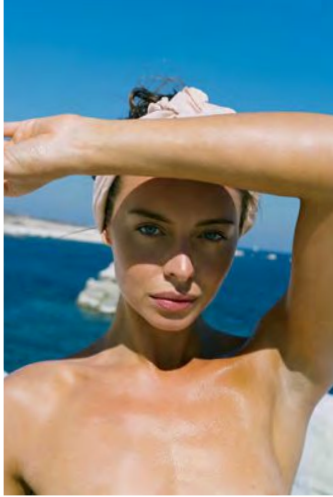
to let go
completely lost in the





I love everything about this place.

I always feel a sense
of calm on the beach
close to the sea...







With bottom cleavage trending up, academics, experts and millennial men and women weigh in on the upsides and downsides of the underboob revolution

UNDER

BY
EJ DICKSON
PHOTO BY
CHRIS HEADS

REBOOB

A CULTURAL HISTORY



In April 2015, Marvel released a preview cover of the first *Inferno*, featuring Goblin Queen Madelyne Pryor in a black leather crop top that revealed the underside of her breasts, colloquially known as underboob. The look wasn't without controversy: By the time the issue debuted in print a month later, the character's abbreviated top had been swapped for a more conservative full-length shirt.

Bloggers speculated that the change was a result of Marvel trying to appease female consumers who'd expressed skepticism that the Goblin Queen would be equipped to fight crime in such a *schmatta*. While undeniably popular with heterosexual gentlemen, such garments have inspired scorn in women, who argue that the look has no utilitarian purpose. That's now changing.

Despite being removed from Marvel's cover, underboob is beginning to transition from fashion faux pas to pop culture mainstay thanks to celebrities including the Jenner sisters and Rihanna, the latter of whom is such a fan of the look that she got an underboob tattoo in 2012. In September, Kendall Jenner snapped herself donning an underboob-baring crop top while encouraging young people to register to vote, captioning the image "Underboob is my ting [*sic*]." Social media went nuts.

It's hard to know whether the underside of Jenner's breasts inspired millennials to head to the polls. But we do know the scientific term for what's been called everything from "bottom cleavage" to "under-curve of the breasts" to "Australian cleavage" (presumably because it's down under). According to Florence Williams,

author of the book *Breasts: A Natural and Unnatural History* and a host of the audio series *Breasts Unbound*, the technical name for the crease where the breast's bottom meets the chest wall is "inframammary fold."

"Like everything about breasts, there's a huge variety among women in terms of whether they have one or not," Williams explains. "Some smaller-breasted women may not have one at all."

For centuries, the underboob has been relegated to the obscure corners of fashion history, simply because clothiers have given women little opportunity to show it off. After the corset was invented in the 16th century, fashion cared only about displaying a woman's décolletage, neck, chest or cleavage.

Clearly, the underboob arose at least in part as a way for designers and photographers to showcase a new part of the breast that hadn't been seen before, without verging into taboo (i.e. nipple-baring) territory. "It's a design puzzle: What are the bits and pieces that can be shown? What are some of the new ways that fabric can be draped on the breast?" says Marjorie Jolles, director and associate professor of women's and gender studies at Roosevelt University, who specializes in fashion. "Designers ask themselves, I can't show a nipple, so what can I show? And what will capture our imaginations and speak to our fantasies in some way?"

It wasn't until the American sexual revolution of the 1970s that the underboob was brought out from the shadows with the advent of boob-baring clothing such as the crop top and the tube top. The trend was highlighted

on PLAYBOY's July 1974 cover, with model Christine Maddox in a soaking-wet cropped Playboy T-shirt.

The aerobics craze of the 1980s, which spawned the DIY aesthetic of cutoff sweatshirts and off-the-shoulder tops, further pushed the underboob into everyday life. "It had a very real moment in the 1980s, thanks to *Flashdance*," says Tiffany Yannetta, shopping director of Racked.

The most prominent pop cultural example of underboob didn't come until almost a decade later, when the cover of Ween's 1994 album, *Chocolate and Cheese*, flaunted model Ashley Savage in a cutoff top and a heavyweight wrestling belt bearing the band's logo. According to the cover's designer, Roger Gorman, the concept was to pay homage to the sultry, borderline soft-core-porn aesthetic of the 1970s, as well as the album art of R&B bands such as the Ohio Players. The decision to showcase Savage's underboob was prompted by a simple question: "How much could we get away with without showing too much?"

Initially the label rejected the cover art, fearing it might be perceived as objectifying women. After much back-and-forth, a compromise was reached. The image has since entered the indie-rock pantheon, earning *Chocolate and Cheese* a spot on numerous lists of the sexiest album covers in history.

Since then, underboob has become synonymous with a cheesecake aesthetic that harkens back to the big-haired, voluptuous pinups of the 1970s and 1980s while simultaneously channeling the effortless look of a girlfriend

UNDERBOOB OVER TIME

1973

Erica Jong pens *Fear of Flying*, a novel of female sexual liberation that sells more than 27 million copies worldwide. The cover of the original paperback edition features a woman half-covered by a sheet, providing a tantalizing glimpse of the bottom half of her breast.



1994

In a watershed moment in boob history, model Ashley Savage dons a cutoff shirt and a heavyweight wrestling belt for the cover of Ween's *Chocolate and Cheese*, thus cementing her place in the pantheon of underboob displayers.



2012

Rihanna, a longtime underboob fan, gets a large tattoo of the Egyptian goddess Isis, wings spread wide, on the underside of her breasts as a tribute to her late grandmother.



1986

In David Lee Roth's video for "Yankee Rose," a woman in a cutoff T-shirt flaunts underboob. The video is noted in a 1993 episode of *Beavis and Butt-Head* in which the title characters comment that they like it when they see "the bottom of their thingies."



2002

At the height of her "Dirrty" phase, and in what is perhaps the most early-aughts-defining look, Christina Aguilera shows up to the MTV Video Music Awards in a tiny denim skirt and a scarf halter top, underboob prominently on display.





lounging in your cutoff Patriots jersey. (Remember Beyoncé's cutoff top and red-leopard-print panties on the cover of a 2013 *GQ*?)

In our nostalgia-loving era, there's a reason underboob is so in vogue: It recalls a simpler time, during the 1970s and early 1980s, when women eschewed push-up bras and implants in favor of a bouncier, more natural look.

"The unharnessed, braless breast appears again and again in fashion these days," Jolles says. "The breast isn't so much pushed up, which requires a lot of artifice, boning and mechanics. I think underboob represents a more natural aesthetic, which maybe signals an aesthetic that is trending away from the silicone look. It's the natural look of a breast in its droopier state."

That's not to say the underboob's new popularity is liberating for women. Social media trends such as the underboob challenge, which involves putting pens underneath women's breasts to test their perkiness, raise the question of whether our cultural taste for underboob propagates unrealistic beauty standards. "It's really keyed into the appeal of the youthful breast," Jolles says. "The breast that has been through a pregnancy and age doesn't have underboob, at least not the way we think of it."

After all, to rock an underboob in the first place, you have to have ample breasts, and they need to be taut and perky enough to create the desired half-moon-under-the-breast effect.

"I feel like it's a feat of science, or rather, your boobs have to be *super* perky," my friend Marian says. "I'd say my boobs are on the perky side of the spectrum, but even I couldn't pull it off."

Even those with objectively perky breasts

may not pass the exacting aesthetic standards of plastic surgeons. Dr. Daniel Maman, a surgeon at 740 Park Plastic Surgery in New York City, says he considers these standards when analyzing a patient's breast during a consultation. "If you look at the aesthetically ideal breast, you want it to have a little bit of hang, but you want to be able to see the underboob, or crease, when you look at the person from the front view," he says. However, he adds, women have "tremendous variation" in terms of where their inframammary folds are placed; in the case of large-breasted women or women who have breast-fed, the folds may not be visible.

Williams speculates that the Jenners' underboob-baring crop tops plus such social media trends as the underboob challenge could create anxiety for women who feel self-conscious about the size and shape of their breasts. "We tend to be in a moment when the large breast reigns supreme, and it's only really the large breast that has the capacity to hold something in the mammary fold," she said.

The last thing women need is another part of their anatomy to feel self-conscious about, but as long as crop tops and bralettes rule the red carpet, underboob won't be going away anytime soon—at least not if inframammary-fold-loving dudes have anything to say about it.

From the young-single-male perspective, my friend Dashiell explains, "underboob catches the eye and shows off the perkiness and cupability of the boob. Like, if you've got handsome underboob, you probably have lovely breasts to behold firsthand. And secondhand." My friend Miles expresses further enthusiasm:

"Cleavage and overboob and nipples get a lot of the glory because of visibility and accessibility. But underboob can be very aesthetically pleasing and great to cup, like if you want to pretend your hands are a bra." (More than a few men also told me that exposure to underboob was one of the more pleasant side benefits of performing cunnilingus.)

Still, crop tops verge on looking like thrift-shop workout gear, and for most women, revealing underboob is more a fashion faux pas than a statement, an indicator that they should have sized up that bra or tank top. For men, however, the appeal is simple. "The nipple is still taboo," Williams says. "Underboob allows you to keep the nipple hidden but present a suggestion of the breast as well."

For a long time, the underboob made few public appearances, occasionally emerging on comic-book covers, in 1980s hair-metal videos or during spin class when the lady next to you wore a tragically ill-fitting sports bra.

"It's so impractical," says Yannetta. "Side boob is one thing, because you can be wearing a gown. Underboob requires you to have most of your torso exposed."

Diana Tsui, senior fashion market editor for *New York* magazine's *The Cut*, agrees. "We're in a time when it's not enough just to be slim; you have to be fit too. And nothing shows that more than having a toned stomach," she says. While side boob is "more egalitarian" in the sense that a woman doesn't necessarily need to have huge boobs and a taut stomach to rock the trend, she says, underboob "is not as forgiving—you have to have amazing abs, plus perky boobs." ■

2015

Marvel releases a preview cover of the first issue of *Inferno*, featuring superhero Madelyne Pryor in a leather underboob-baring contraption. A month later, Pryor's crop top is replaced with a full-length shirt.



2016

At the 2016 MTV Video Music Awards, Halsey causes a stir when she appears in a sequined crop top featuring bottom breast while performing alongside Andrew Taggart of the Chainsmokers.



2016

Purportedly as a way to convince teens to vote, Kendall Jenner snaps herself in a cropped sweater at MTV's *Total Registration Live*, with the caption "Underboob is my ting."

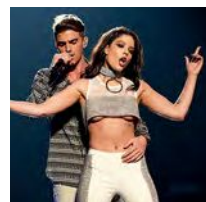
2013

GQ names Beyoncé the sexiest woman of the century. Queen Bey appears on the cover of the magazine sporting a belly chain, red-leopard-print underwear and a cutoff jersey that bares just a hint of underboob.



2015

Thailand officially bans underboob selfies, stating that such content is obscene and could potentially cause "damage to the country's security" or "public panic." Anyone caught posting underboob selfies could face up to five years in prison.



2016

Model and singer Teyana Taylor, who stars in Kanye West's "Fade" video, walks the runway for Yeezy Season 4 during New York Fashion Week, flaunting underboob in a tiny black crop top.





PLAYMATE

A large, elegant, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Joy Corrigan".

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONATHAN LEDER

“I grew up poor. I didn’t know drinking powdered milk and wearing hand-me-downs wasn’t the norm,” says Miss February **Joy Corrigan**, who was raised on a small farm in North Carolina as one of 10 siblings. “I never imagined how much my hard work and focus would one day pay off.” It’s difficult to believe, but Joy, a world traveler and budding supermodel, was teased in school. Now she’s getting the last laugh. “When I first started pursuing my dream, several people tried to dissuade me and were not very supportive. One person told me that I see the world through rose-colored glasses. I’d have to agree, only now it’s when I’m modeling those glasses, surrounded by photographers, on set in exotic locations.” Oh, and Joy practiced martial arts for eight years and has a second-degree black belt in *tang soo do*. So a note to erstwhile bullies: If Miss February weren’t such a down-to-earth sweetheart, she could kick your ass if she wanted to.













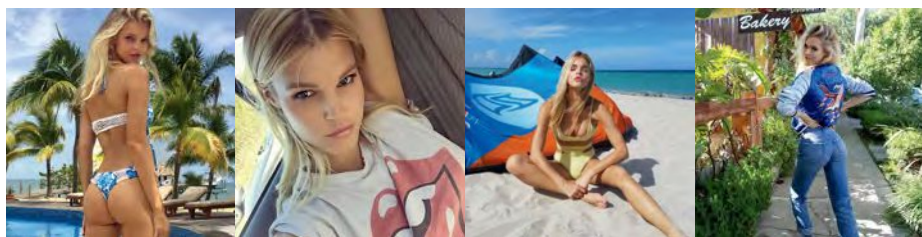








J O Y C O R R I G A N



AGE: 21 **BIRTHPLACE:** Raleigh, North Carolina **CURRENT CITY:** Los Angeles, California

MY PATH TO PLAYBOY

A woman today can be as strong as she feels. Seeing women around the world being respected and acknowledged for their hard work and for having strong opinions has given me the courage to reach more goals this year than I could have imagined. I'm happy PLAYBOY has revamped its branding. It makes me want to be part of this timeless publication even more than before.

WHAT TRAVELING THE WORLD HAS TAUGHT ME

I always keep an open mind. I love learning about different beliefs, cultures and opinions from everyone I meet. Each trip offers a new life experience and helps me

learn and grow, both professionally and in my personal life.

BIG FAMILY, SMALL PROBLEMS

I grew up on a farm in North Carolina with six brothers and three sisters. I really don't sweat the small stuff. Having so many siblings has taught me to thrive in the blissful chaos and just enjoy the ride!

THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION ABOUT ME

That all I do is lie on a beach all day. Maybe I do that on most days, but I certainly don't do it every day. Just kidding! I do think some people underestimate how much hard work I put into traveling and shooting.

HOW TECH KILLED ROMANCE

There used to be that moment when your date would call and you'd answer and get butterflies, as opposed to now, when you show emotion by texting emojis. Not to mention when a date would pick you up in his car instead of ordering you an Uber.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK

My biggest passion is art, and I'm always working on at least three or four paintings. Instead of having a ton of friends, I have a few best friends. I would much rather go camping than go to a club. On a Friday night, I'm most likely cuddling on the couch, watching Netflix and eating my homemade truffle chili popcorn.

@joycorrigan @_joycorrigan







Detail of Norman Bluhm's
Inside Orange, 1966.

Infiltrating the CIA's Secret *Art* Collection

Few outsiders have seen (or even know about) the controversial works that hang inside the agency's heavily fortified Virginia headquarters—until now



We realize we're at the wrong entrance when a police cruiser pulls up behind our car. An officer steps out with one hand on his sidearm, eyes locked on me, as I approach a guard posted in front of the Central Intelligence Agency's hyper-secure headquarters in Langley, Virginia. My photographer, Ferdous "Danny" Al-Faruque, stays in the car, hands in plain view to avoid spooking the spooks. Thus begins our bizarre descent into the CIA rabbit hole, not to unearth classified documents on torture at Guantánamo

BY **MENACHEM WECKER**

Bay or UFO warehousing at Area 51 but to sneak a peek at the controver-

sial million-dollar-plus art collection hanging inside—a collection that has grabbed headlines of late not only because few outsiders have laid eyes on it but also because for years the CIA seemingly didn't want anyone to know its contents.

Unbeknownst to many, the CIA established its own arts commission in 1963 for purposes that vary from "the selection of the colors of paint for the walls" to "the development, location and display of exhibits." The agency website briefly mentions a collection of abstract paintings that "represent an elemental approach to art, a swash-buckling donor and a connection to the architecture of the [original headquarters building]." This collection is separate from the CIA's highly publicized museum of intelligence-themed artwork and historical artifacts such as clothing, weapons and radio equipment. According to the site, the paintings arrived by way of an eccentric collector named Vincent Melzac, who by the time he died in 1989 had become notorious in D.C. for his hotheadedness.

It wasn't until around 2015 that public interest in the Melzac collection caught fire, after the CIA denied several Freedom of Information Act requests about it from a Portland, Oregon-based artist named Johanna "Joby" Barron. In a 2015 appeal, Barron threatened the agency with a lawsuit, stating, "Should you continue to deny

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FERDOUS AL-FARUQUE



The CIA's Melzac collection holds 11 paintings associated with the Washington Color School, including Thomas Downing's *Dapple* (top right) and Robert Newmann's *Arrows* (bottom right).

my request in whole or in part, and if you do not provide a satisfactory explanation of any withheld or excerpted materials, I may take legal action to compel disclosure under the FOIA.”

Details about the collection—specifically the artists and works on display—have since vaporized into myth, both controversial and misrepresented. In December 2015, art website Hyperallergic noted, “Unless you’re one of the CIA’s undisclosed number of employees, your chances of ever seeing these paintings, or even digital images of them, are pretty slim.” In February 2016 CNN reported, “The identities of many of the artworks remain unknown.”

The CIA’s repeated dismissals of Barron’s FOIA requests underscore the collection’s purported secrecy, though some of the works can be seen in artist Taryn Simon’s 2007 collection *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*. Other pieces appear briefly in *Argo*, the 2013 best picture Oscar winner, some of which was shot on location at Langley. But it wasn’t until producers at Warner Bros. tried to secure image rights that one of the artists, Robert Newmann, learned that a painting of his hangs in CIA headquarters. “I’m not exactly thrilled my painting is there,” says Newmann. “I would never have approved it, nor do I think any of the other artists would have.”

Talking with Newmann on the phone after my visit to Langley, I tell him the CIA had said none of the artists were still alive. When Warner Bros. contacted Newmann in 2012, the studio told him that the CIA said it hadn’t been able to find him. “I’ve been living in New York for 35 years in the same loft,” he says. “It’s a sad comment that Warner Bros. could find me but the CIA couldn’t.”

Unraveling the mysteries surrounding the collection is why Danny and I are at Langley, but first, we have to get inside. Clearance heretofore has been tense, the culmination of dozens of phone calls and e-mails and several security checks over more than a month. After sending a blind e-mail through the CIA website, I received a response from a woman named Molly Hale saying she’d forward my request to the appropriate party. The website notes that Hale has worked at the agency since 2002, is the “public voice of the CIA” and “reads more than 13,000 e-mails, answers 3,000 phone calls, reads 900 faxes and sends out several hundred letters” in a given month. A simple Google search for “Molly Hale,” however, raises questions about her existence.

Lo and behold, I received a call back from CIA spokesperson Glenn Miller. I’d sensed from media reports that it would be impossible to view the artwork in person, but Miller agreed to let

Danny and me in. And so we’re finally here, albeit drawing way too much attention to ourselves.

Walking through the front doors of an agency responsible for the assassination of Osama bin Laden and for “enhanced interrogation techniques” such as waterboarding in “black sites” is unnerving. We undergo a screening process that’s like the Transportation Security Administration on steroids. Recording devices are off limits, and Danny has to take his camera apart so it can be inspected. Each photo he takes has to be approved to ensure he hasn’t accidentally captured undercover agents in the hallways. He’s also forbidden to photograph signage on walls or doors. We empty our pockets, feed everything through an X-ray machine and walk through a metal detector. On the other side, we meet the seven-person escort team, including curatorial, security and communications staffers, that will accompany us on our three-hour tour.

Gregory Manougian, a bow-tie-clad architect who is chairman of the CIA’s fine arts commission, is our guide. The collection is spread across four floors of hospital-like corridors. CNN, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Smithsonian* magazine have reported that as many as 29 works may be on display in the 2.5 million-square-foot headquarters, but Manougian says the current



WALKING THROUGH THE FRONT DOORS OF AN AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF OSAMA BIN LADEN IS UNNERVING.

collection contains only 11, all identified with the Washington Color School, a postwar abstract-art movement that included painters Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing and Howard Mehring. Works by the latter three hang in the agency today.

The collection's common denominator is Melzac, a high-profile collector, Republican businessman, Arabian-horse breeder and former chief executive of Washington, D.C.'s Corcoran Gallery of Art. In 1968, he lent the agency eight paintings by artists associated with the Washington Color School. He would go on to lend it a total of 29 works. William Casey, then director of central intelligence, awarded Melzac the agency's seal medallion in 1982 for "his generous support to the CIA."

There was, however, a tale of two Melzacs—a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde. Although renowned critic and collector Clement Greenberg referred to him as "the only other collector I know with guts," Melzac was also known for his temper and,

according to *The Washington Post*, his tendency to be "a blunt and tough-minded cost-cutter." The most notorious episode of Melzac's Corcoran tenure was his fistfight with then gallery director Gene Baro at a 1972 black-tie opening for a Sam Francis exhibit. The fight was so gory, Baro told the *Post*, he'd bled "like a stuck pig." A photograph of Baro with blood streaming from his eye appears on the website of Roy Slade, who became Corcoran director following Melzac's and Baro's resignations. According to Slade, who describes the night on his website, Melzac was disgruntled because guests weren't paying enough attention to his wife, "busty and blonde, in a glittering silver dress." The men also disagreed over who deserved to appear in a photo with Corcoran artist Sally Drummond; an argument ensued, a drink was thrown, and then it was fisticuffs.

In Melzac's obituary, the *Post* called him "one of the earliest and boldest collectors" of the Washington Color School, praising him for having "the confidence to buy where others had

not bought before." This brings us back to Langley.

In the late 1980s, the agency bought 11 of the paintings Melzac had lent it, for \$286,000—"federally approved dollars," says Manougian. (Taking inflation into account,

\$286,000 in 1988 would equal about \$584,000 today.) Now the works are valued at more than \$1.3 million collectively—a good investment, as Manougian jokes. In November 2015, the National Press Club sold at auction a Norman Rockwell painting it owned for \$11.6 million; I ask if the CIA would ever sell the 11 Melzac paintings. Manougian responds with the understatement of the day: "Our budget is a little bit larger than the Press Club's." If Edward Snowden's leaked documents are correct, \$1.3 million isn't even a drop in the agency's bucket; its budget in 2013 was a reported \$14.7 billion.

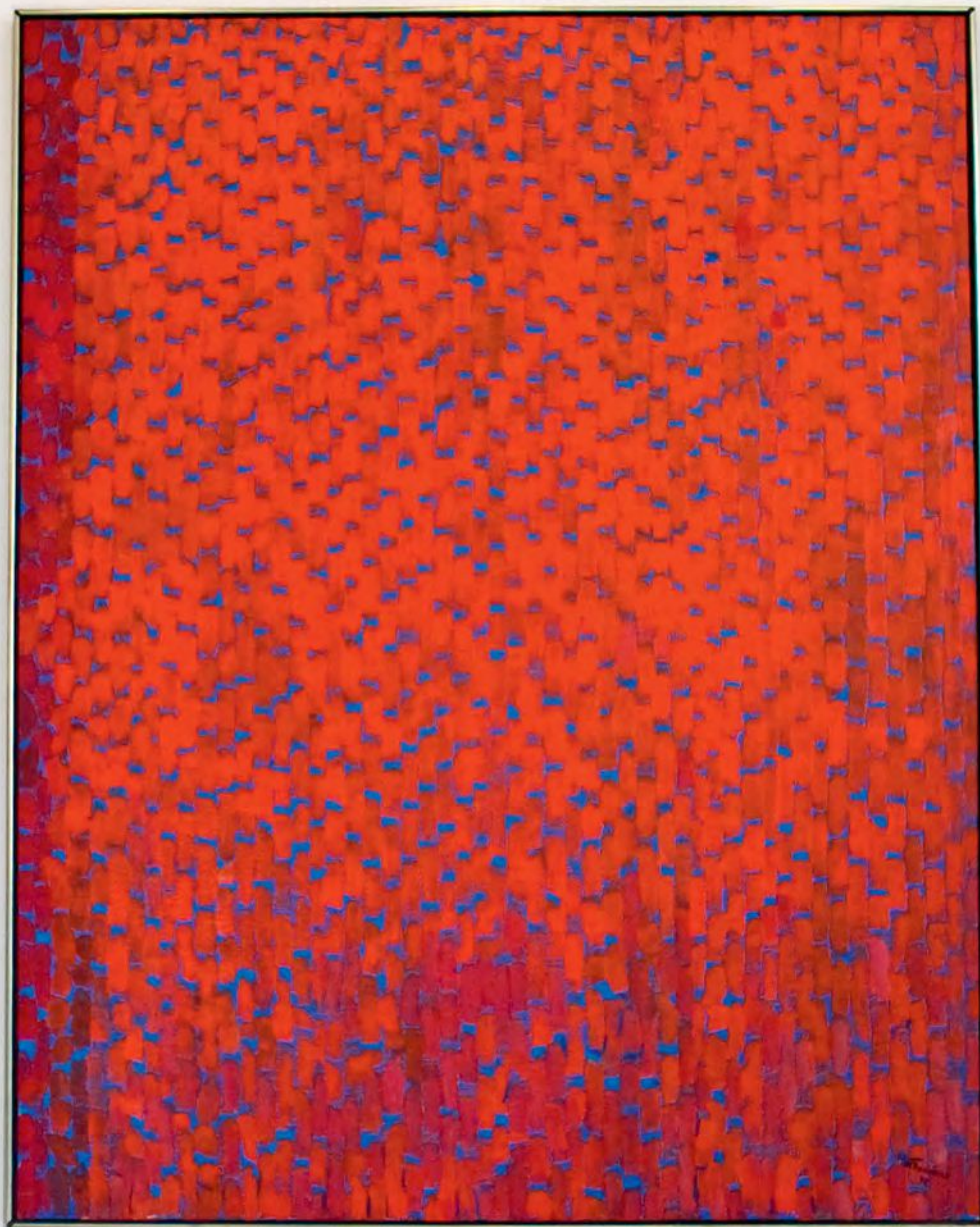
As we view the first four works—two untitled Howard Mehring paintings from the late 1950s, Thomas Downing's *Planks* (1967) and Newmann's *Arrows* (1968)—Danny and I spot two men tailing us from 20 yards away. One, a middle-aged guy, carries a laptop, while the other, a much taller bearded man who appears to be in his early 30s, holds a tablet with antennae. Both wear black pants and coats, but they're so conspicuous they might as well be wearing bells and whistles. Danny gets a glimpse of the tablet, which appears to be running a sniffer program to ensure we aren't emitting radio signals. A journalist and techie who teaches cybersecurity at the National Press Club to help reporters protect their data, Danny knows about sniffer programs. Soon the man sees Danny sniffing his apparent sniffer program and turns the screen away. A game ensues in which our tails pretend not to be there and Danny pretends not to see them.

We walk along a hallway en route to the next three works, all untitled, by Downing (circa 1959), Norman Bluhm (1966) and Mehring (circa 1960). An obvious question arises: Why does the CIA have artwork of this caliber? Why not fill the walls with mass-produced prints of skylines and fruit bowls, as in most government buildings?

Manougian reiterates something the agency has expressed publicly: The paintings have utility in training analysts to think critically and remove biases. According to some experts, art appreciation can expose viewers to multiple perspectives and different ways of seeing the world. The 1999 book *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, published by the CIA's Center for the



Joby Barron, inspired by the government's lack of transparency, re-created part of the CIA's collection.



**THE AUDIENCE AT LANGLEY IS FAR FROM
WHAT THE ARTISTS WOULD HAVE WANTED.**

Alma Thomas's *Mars
Reflection*, 1972.



Study of Intelligence, famously uses a drawing that depicts an old woman from one perspective and a young woman from another—like the famous Rubin vase, which doubles as a vase and two faces—to show “the principle that mind-sets are quick to form but resistant to change.”

Eike Schmidt, director of Florence’s Uffizi Gallery and previously a curator at Washington’s National Gallery of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum in L.A., backs up this theory. “It’s well-known in the corporate world to use artwork in leadership and similar training,” he says. “Nowadays this is done mostly with digital images or reproductions, but it’s credible that in the 1980s or early 1990s this was a primary reason to purchase the collection.” This baffles Newmann, the only living artist in the CIA collection. “I have to scratch my head on that,” he says. “I don’t understand their motivation: why they want these things or why they ever thought they wanted them.”

Simon, the multidisciplinary artist who photographed some of the works in 2007, writes on her website, “It is speculated that some of the CIA’s involvement in the arts was designed to counter Soviet Communism by helping to popularize what it considered pro-American thought and aesthetic sensibilities.” Since its founding in 1947, the CIA “has participated in both covert and public cultural diplomacy efforts throughout the world,” she adds.

Public-information warrior Barron first learned about the works after seeing one of Simon’s images. In 2009, as a graduate student at the University of California, Davis, Barron began to request information. She left the project for a few years, her letters unanswered, before submitting her first FOIA requests around 2013. The goal was to get as much information about the works as possible so she could recreate them for an ongoing project inspired by the government’s lack of transparency. “It bothered me that I never received a response,” she says. “That information should be available. As a citizen, I should have access to that.”

The problem arose from complications of writing FOIA requests and asking for information about artwork, which lies in a gray area. “It’s like asking for a picture of a plant,” Barron says. Her research convinced her that the initial loan and subsequent sale of the collection mainly benefited Melzac, the original owner. “My understanding of why he donated it is he was getting big tax write-offs. He was getting the work from the artists really cheap, and then he was donating it to institutions,” she says. “He sort of determined the market value.” Her last request, to which she’s still awaiting an official reply, was over a year ago. I bring up her requests with Manougian, who calls Barron’s charges “almost a conspiracy



Gregory Manougian, chairman of the CIA’s fine arts commission, with Downing’s 1960 *Center Grid*. The painting hangs on the fourth floor of the agency’s headquarters, which Manougian says is one of the most heavily trafficked by staff members and thus least accessible to the public.

theory.” The misconception, he says, stems from “3,000 miles contributing to this misunderstanding.” (“I’m not really sure how much more clear I can be,” Barron says in response.)

The CIA may be using the works for purposes other than they were intended, but in this case the art is important just as art. One of the painters, Gene Davis, is currently the subject of a one-person show at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, which refers to him as “one of Washington, D.C.’s outstanding visual artists.” At Langley, conservators have examined all 11 paintings within the past five years, but they’re hardly being held in museum conditions. Many have accumulated significant dust on their frames, and several have visible surface damage.

The biggest revelation of our tour may be that the Melzac collection isn’t as invisible as reported. Although the paintings aren’t accessible to the general public, 250,000 people see them every year, based on rough agency estimates of employees, tours, expos and attendance at family days—when relatives of CIA staffers visit. “The floors are as worn out as they are because of all the visitors,” Manougian says. By the time this story went to press, the CIA had granted a tour to a writer from *Hyperallergic*, the website that originally reported the collection as off-limits.

Regardless of how one looks at it—whether the works are “too private,” as the media tell it, or very public, as the CIA claims—the audience at Langley is far from what the artists presumably would have wanted. “All these people, myself included, were left of center,” says Newmann. “I painted my painting around 1968. It was a turbulent time. There were the Martin

Luther King Jr. riots, the Kennedy assassination. The Vietnam War was raging, and I was of draft age.” He remembers attending peace marches with Downing. Having counted Melzac as a friend who once lent him money to buy a car, Newmann is shocked to learn he sold his piece to the government. Perhaps that’s why it appears Melzac never told any of them. The agency has invited Newmann to see his work in Langley, but he hasn’t accepted.

As Danny and I make our way up the escalators to increasingly restricted areas, we see the final pieces: Downing’s *Dapple* (circa 1959) and *Center Grid* (circa 1960), Alma Thomas’s *Mars Reflection* (1972), Gene Davis’s *Black Rhythm* (1964). When Danny sees the Davis painting, one of the few works the CIA uses to represent the collection online, he notes how its vertical stripes—reds, yellows, blues, pinks, greens, blacks and grays—merge with the lines of the escalator steps. Sometimes the art jibes with its surroundings.

As we pile into the elevator back to the first floor, Manougian turns to one of our handlers. “Did we lose our tail?” he asks. He’s told the two men have taken a separate elevator. Back on the ground floor, we return to the entrance, which displays the gravitas one would expect of a government agency, down to the large circular seal on the floor. A bald eagle’s head rests atop a twisted wreath on a shield bearing a 16-point compass. On our way out, security personnel inspect the 234 photographs Danny has snapped to ensure each is kosher. As he scrolls through the images on his camera, he’s told to delete 13 of them. It wouldn’t be a visit to the CIA without at least some redaction, after all. ■

After Midnight

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PRINCE AND JACOB
MODEL: KYRA SANTORO

















VISITING VIOLENCE

AFTER
SURVIVING
A MISSION
GONE
BAD,



A
SEAL
STARTS
QUESTIONING
HIS
LIFELONG
CONVICTIONS

By JON RAYMOND



FICTION

Ever since he was a child, Ben Singer had despised baseball. It was a game of zero hustle, no meaty physical contact, no flame-engulfing accidents, no perilous flips, spins or even dismounts, a sport of millionaire morons dressed up in children's costumes, spitting on their own shoes. Not to mention, the food they served at the ballparks was disgusting. For upward of 40 years he'd been making the case against baseball one bar stool at a time, and it was only very recently that he'd begun to wonder if maybe in this he'd been wrong too.

Today, seated in the bleachers of his former high school, watching a brightly colored squadron of young men arranged against a singular opposing batter in a white jersey, Ben was forced to wonder if maybe all his tirades against baseball had been wrongly conceived. Maybe all those baseball-loving fuckheads had a point. On a sunny summer afternoon—the smell of cut grass and citrus mixing with the smell of hot dogs and stale popcorn, the sounds of the kids yelling, the crack of the bat—baseball was proving not all that bad, maybe even kind of great, a form of deep communion with the American grass and earth itself.

In a way, Ben could see, he'd never really had a chance to like baseball. He'd been reared in a deeply anti-baseball household, after all, the son of an anti-baseball father, himself the son of a man who'd certainly never heard of baseball, and thus in a way he'd been brainwashed from the start. His dad—an immigrant from Kraków—had never truly had any feel for the pageantry and passion of the great American sports institutions, nor for the pleasures of American spectatorship in general. Football he could vaguely understand: That was just the violent acquisition of real estate. Basketball: At least that took a certain African dexterity. Those men, his dad allowed, were like physical gods. But baseball—what was that? “They don't even run,” he'd scoff, pausing to rap the TV's thick glass with his knuckles. “They just stand there scratching their nuts. This is a sport? This is golf.” Golf being the most ridiculous pastime invented by man.

By adolescence Ben had taken for granted that baseball was a mistake, a hoax perpetrated by stupid fathers on their stupid sons, and over the years his prejudice had hardened,

excluding him from many a loud, dudish conversation. Among the guys in his platoons, he'd often been construed as eccentric and deranged, although admittedly he probably would have been viewed as eccentric and deranged by most of the redneck goyim he'd served with anyway, baseball being only the smallest of his differences. But today, at last, leaning back against the dry, chipped wood of the bleacher, the heat of the American sun warming his face, he was understanding many things about America and baseball he'd never known.

The game, as usual, seemed stalled out between events, but for once he felt the low-burning suspense. The catcher, a fluid, blond kid, was madly signaling the pitcher, a mere noodle, who silently confirmed something before averting his gaze. The kids in the dugout were almost drooling, they were so hypnotized by the stasis. In the bleachers, the parents and siblings and girlfriends were also happily entranced. Baseball, he realized, was a mode of group contemplation, a meditative discipline unique to the psyches of America's soft, defenseless potato people. This was the place the happy people pooled their attention to renew the happy life they knew as their due.

The crack of the bat. A tepid roar. By the time Ben located the ball, rolling in center field, the batter was almost at second, and then, in a snap, the ball was back idling in the pitcher's mitt, getting fondled and massaged, and the signals between pitcher and catcher were starting up again. The mothers and fathers were pushing more fingerloads of yellow popcorn into their faces. A plane crawled through the upper reaches of the atmosphere. Strike one, the ump called, over

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY PABLO DELCÁN & COMPANY



How he would've enjoyed pulling the trigger, killing a monster.

the corner of the plate. And at this Ben had been there as long as he could stand.

...

He made his way through the scalding parking lot, the setting of much long-ago mischief and romance, thoughts of baseball still turning in his head. This was only his third trip back to Sun Valley in 20 years, and, walking the gravel shoulder of the road into town, he was barraged by long-dormant memories. Over in that yard, a euphoric water balloon fight. In those bushes, a bleary kegger ending with police sirens. Over there, an evil brown dog. After all this time, he was pleased to find the local sunlight still recognized him, clapping him on the shoulder with a familiar heat, and the whoosh of passing cars still carried a familiar scent of minerals and gasoline. Soon the first buildings of downtown were passing on either side, bringing more vaporous impressions, and he felt confirmed in his intuitions that the visit was a good idea and that the old haunts might hold the secret not only of his past but possibly of his future as well.

A year ago he never would have been here. A year back, and two, and three, he would have been off at war, fighting on the front lines of America's campaign for freedom, guided still by the great truism that had dictated his actions since he was 15 years old, the single axiom he'd ever deemed worthy of a tattoo. Even now the words stretched across the taut curves of his deltoids, shoulder to shoulder, in a plain, unadorned, antique typewriter font: "We sleep safe in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm." A year ago he'd had no reason to question that truth, but, like so many of his truths these days, it was under violent siege.

The sentence was George Orwell. Some people assumed Winston Churchill, but those people were wrong. Others said Richard Grenier and they might have a point. In any case,

Ben still remembered the first time he'd read the sentence in the pages of the *New Republic* magazine at the Village Drug Store, not two blocks from where he currently walked—how electrified he'd been, how deeply and intuitively he'd known the sentiment was correct. Yes, he'd thought, this placid American life is not what it seems. It is in fact as fragile as a soap bubble, an aberration of history, and all these people, these soft-skinned children, mothers, salesmen and professional athletes, exist in their comfort only because their world is ringed with far-off sentries. Most people, he realized, had no idea this was the case. They enjoyed their American happiness in blissful ignorance. But the horror of his father's childhood had opened him to a different reality. Without armies: ovens. That was a fact. From that day onward, he'd taken the quotation as a fundamental postulate of his life.

One of his goals for the trip to Sun Valley had been to locate that Village Drug Store and possibly even re-create that youthful, epiphanic moment, but, as it turned out, not surprisingly, the building was gone. In its place was a bland plaza studded with concrete benches and a flagpole, which seemed appropriate. The flag, like so many flags these days, was wadded at half-staff, although Ben had no idea what the day's tragedy might be. When had all the flags in the country gone permanently half-staff? he wondered. And what was the smell that flowed out of Subway's doors? Was it supposed to smell like bread?

He sat down and watched three teen skateboarders testing their mettle against some concrete steps. They weren't very good, but they were okay to watch. One of them had those stupid white dreadlocks, and another one wore an oversized T-shirt with a peace symbol on the chest.

The peace symbol reminded Ben of another Orwell quote, also excellent but not deserving of a tattoo: "Pacifism is objectively

pro-fascist." How could he explain that sentiment to this ignorant skateboarder? What it meant to him—as he'd lectured many times on many continents, mostly to men about to parachute out of planes or storm jungle encampments of insurgent guerrillas—was that the struggle against evil was always already enjoined. Evil was real. Evil was out there, seeking to enslave you, and you had the choice either to fight evil or become an appeaser of evil. There were no spectators in the fight. Those cement stairs where kids wasted their days doing ollies: menaced by evil darkness. The infrastructure that allowed that Subway to dispense its food product: thanks only to the pain and sacrifice of tireless soldiers somewhere off in the shit.

For 24 years Ben had been one of the rough men visiting violence in the night in the name of freedom. He couldn't even remember all the violence he'd visited. He'd visited violence in Honduras, hanging with the last of the contras before Ortega fell out of power. He'd visited violence in Bosnia, eliminating the murderous henchmen of Milošević. He'd attempted to visit violence in North Korea one time, but sadly that mission hadn't gone off. He'd spent three days in a ghillie suit, sitting in a trench in the DMZ, shitting into a sluice, waiting for the appearance of Kim Jong Il from his bomb-resistant underground concrete bunker, but the dictator had never materialized. Intelligence had been wrong, much to his chagrin. Oh, how he would have enjoyed pulling the trigger on that one. To have killed a totalitarian monster. It would have made for a very good day.

For the past few years, he'd mostly been visiting his violence in Afghanistan. He'd been knocking around in Kabul and the northern provinces, putting the hurt on Taliban chieftains and various recalcitrant goat herders slow to accept the civilizing hand of the American liberation. He'd prided himself on the

surgical nature of his violence-visiting and had genuinely enjoyed his place in the hierarchy of his nation's armed forces, his status as a deadly weapon in the hands of the men who guided his people down the treacherous path of their destiny. He'd lived happily in the darkness, knowing his actions guaranteed the light-filled life back home in the States.

And then, about a year ago, there had been a change. The poles had reversed. Every intuition had turned inside out, and ever since then the light and the dark were no longer so easy to tell apart. The men in charge didn't seem so unimpeachable, and all those he'd opposed had ideas that weren't so easy to dismiss.

The change, as far as he could tell, had started in Kunduz during the mission to kill the savage warlord Abdul Rashid Mazari. For two weeks, Ben had been stationed on a rooftop as satellites drifted in and out of position,

beaming images to the suburbs of Virginia, accumulating data. He'd been happy enough to wait—that was his job, after all—and he'd packed in enough meals for a month, as well as a smartphone loaded with history tomes. It all would have been easy enough if not for the rancid smell that had plagued him from the start.

The smell had been truly terrible. A dying-animal smell, a rotten-meat-in-the-hot-sun smell. A little reconnaissance had revealed the source to be consistent with the nightly screams emanating from a nearby apartment window. As it turned out, the screaming and the stench originated from the exact same spot, the body of a young boy, maybe nine years old, with an infected wound on his leg, probably the result of an errant IED. Ben's explicit orders had been to avoid all engagement with the locals, but in this case he'd gone ahead and broken them. The smell was too awful, and one

night he'd stormed into the house, tied up the parents, and treated the boy's leg with some good old-fashioned American antibiotics. He'd done this five more times, encountering successively less struggle and fear on the part of the boy and his family, possibly even some looks of damp gratitude, and by the time the order to debrain the warlord came in, the leg was showing some definite signs of repair. He'd completed his mission with all the attendant pyrotechnics and never saw that kid again.

He should have taken a break about then, but, as it happened, the boy and his infected leg bumped up against another significant event in Ben's tour of duty, the trip to Bagram and the mission to rescue two SEALs in the mountains of Barai Ghar.

That mission had been a clusterfuck from minute one. A Chinook had been downed on the top of an unnamed peak, and Ben's team had been assigned to snatch the survivors before the savages arrived to lop off their heads. Their helicopter had followed the first helicopter's path over the mountaintops, into the navel of the world, as the local dirt farmers called it, and at the designated coordinates had crept downward to the frozen, god-forsaken landing zone. Why the LZ was rutted with narrow tracks, and why there was an unmanned, vintage 1980s Russian-made antiaircraft machine gun sitting there, no one knew, but according to the gunship all was clear. Optical heat sensors picked up no human-size signatures. It was at the sight of the decapitated donkeys and goats hanging in spindly trees that the major sirens went up. Obviously, the LZ was already inhabited by hostiles.

"I'm looking at donkeys and goats here," Ben's pilot radioed to base.

"No enemy combatants on the ground," said the gunship.

"I see goats in trees." That was when the rocket-propelled grenade punched a hole in the electrical pod, passing through the left mini gun ammo can, and exploded in the interior of the aircraft. A second later, another RPG hit the right-side radar pod. Another exploded in the snow by the right front and peppered the Chinook with shrapnel. Another hit the right-side turbine on the tail.

So much for trusting a screen more than your own eyeballs. The cathode ray tubes spooled down and faded to black. Out went the multi-function displays, the navigation systems with GPS, the automatic flight-control systems, the radios and every other operating component. Out went the generators and down came the bundles of transmission and hydraulic lines,





No matter where he went, the images and ghosts plagued him.

splashing burning-hot liquid everywhere in the cabin. Only when the electricity goes out does anyone get real, Ben flashed. Only when the power disappears does anyone start seeing again, thinking again. This was a new lesson for him.

Ben had survived the ensuing firefight, just barely. He'd been flown to Kabul, then Germany, then D.C., where he'd recuperated adequately enough, though not so adequately that the SEALs were any longer an option. At age 41, he was well past the sell-by date, anyway, and by all standards ready for the downshift into a life of consulting. It was in this period that his moral inversion had become complete. "Consulting," it had turned out, was another word for "bodyguarding," and his first client had been an executive for a major multinational construction company. Ben's job had been to accompany this vice president on his tours throughout Central Africa, visiting various oil fields, consulates, government buildings, river deltas and so forth. In this capacity, Ben had enjoyed a front-row seat to the daily routines of a corporate master of the universe, a very nice man named Michael Holmes, who never said an unkind word to anyone because he had Ben standing next to him with an AK-47. You get up into the upper echelons of power, Ben had been told, and there are basically two kinds of arrangements: a nice guy surrounded by assholes, or an asshole surrounded by nice guys. In this situation, it was the former, and he was the asshole. Back and forth between mind-crushing poverty and mind-crushing opulence he'd traveled with this nice man. To Europe to visit a son at the Sorbonne, to Dubai to make deals with the sheiks, back to Africa to walk the perimeter of the oil field on the edge of the slums of Nairobi.

All of these experiences, taken together, back to back, had demolished some of Ben's basic foundations. When the time had come to re-up his contract, he'd bowed out, and ever

since then he'd been wandering alone, his mind a fiery collage of festering leg wounds, burning helicopters, starving babies, prep school graduation parties, greasy blood spurring from a savage warlord's head. Not to mention the ghosts. They'd become regular visitors of late, these void-eyed apparitions unable to communicate whatever searing message they'd been assigned to deliver. So far they only stood there, mute and terrifying, hovering in half shadow, casting shrieking headaches and stabbing ear pain, but who knew when they might reach out and touch him? No matter where he went, the images and ghosts plagued him. And none could answer his one, simple question: Why was one kid left to die and another sent to play baseball?

Such was his inner turbulence as he stood across the street from his father's home, a stucco ranch on a *Peanuts*-style cul-de-sac. He'd been thinking he'd call on his dad today, surprise him with his sudden arrival, but he could see that wasn't going to be the case. He didn't want his dad to see him in this state, so fried, so freaked. It was so strange: Here he was, a guy who'd built entire telecom stations in hurricanes, swum miles in the Indian Ocean surrounded by tiger sharks and parachuted from low-flying planes into minefields surrounding terrorist encampments, but he couldn't make himself walk up and knock on his dad's door.

The sun was sinking, and the pictures continued to flash in Ben's skull: bleeding wounds, dismembered goats, suburban parking lots. Every image encapsulated an entire world of experience, and all of them were at war with one another. If only they'd stop for a second, maybe he could string together a thought, but they strobed on and on, ever more harshly, to the point where his head was ringing with pain. He fashioned a mental baseball bat and began swinging at random, smashing the images as they appeared, splintering

them into tiny shards. It was almost calming, in a way. *Thwack, thwack, thwack*. His mind became the sound of wood thwacking hard earth. He stood on the sidewalk feeling the woody report in the bones of his face. He doubted this was happening in anyone else's brain, this mental smashing. None of his dad's neighbors were prone to suffering in this way. They were all too happy sucking on their barrels of carbonated sugar water, running mazes on their handheld phones, enjoying the bounty of this good, American life. It was a life he needed to discover some way to join, now that his nights as a rough man were done—he knew that.

His eyes roamed his childhood street, seeking respite in all the old places. He didn't dare look at the neighbors' windows because there might be ghosts, and he didn't want to look at his dad's house because it was almost vibrating with mysterious, pent-up energies. In his heart he still believed that Orwell was right, but he had to admit, the burning sensation growing in his chest argued otherwise. It was possible the postulate of peace through violence might even have some fatal flaw. Staring at his dad's roof, imagining flames shooting skyward, napalm spreading over the earth, all manner of burning death, feeling his head slowly separating from his body, he began to wonder the once unthinkable: What if America was not imperiled by enemies on another continent at all? What if all the potato people enjoyed their supersized happiness not thanks to the rough men but simply because? After almost three decades of extreme clarity on the matter, he was no longer at all sure. And without that clarity, there were other big questions to answer, too. Namely, if the enemy wasn't out there, then what the fuck had all that violence even been for? ■

From the novel Freebird by Jon Raymond, out in January 2017 from Graywolf Press.



MISHANT



MISS DECEMBER
ENIKO MIHALIK

2016

PLAYMATE

REVIEW

Twelve months, 12 beautiful Playmates. Who will be crowned 2017 Playmate of the Year?
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MISS MAY
BROOK POWER



MISS OCTOBER
ALLIE SILVA



MISS JUNE
JOSIE CANSECO



MISS JULY
ALI MICHAEL



MISS APRIL
CAMILLE ROWE



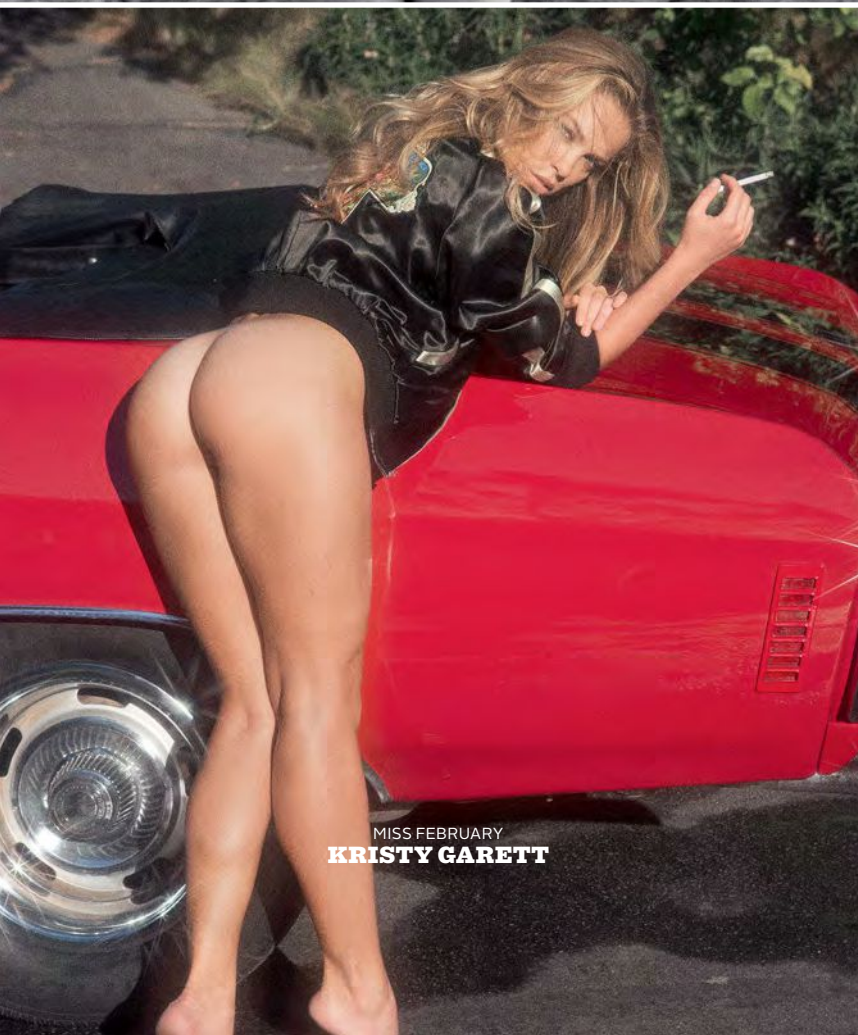
MISS SEPTEMBER
KELLY GALE



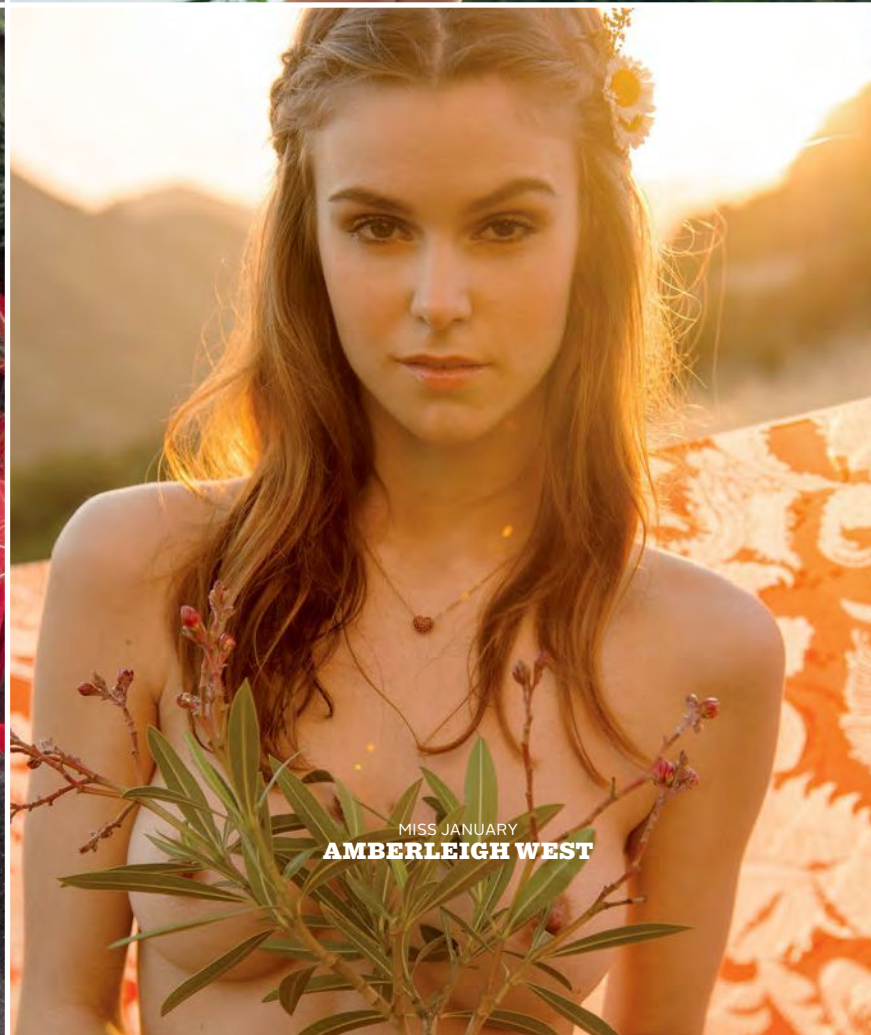
MISS MARCH
DREE HEMINGWAY



MISS AUGUST
VALERIE VANDER GRAAF



MISS FEBRUARY
KRISTY GARETT



MISS JANUARY
AMBERLEIGH WEST



ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

NATUREL

BY **BEN HAGGERTY, A.K.A. MACKLEMORE**

*I first saw Lawrence “Naturel” Atoigue’s artwork on the Gram. It popped out of the iPhone screen and made its place among the scroll of my ADHD timeline. Shapes—they’re what make up Naturel’s art. Shape after geometric shape that somehow coalesce into an image, often of a rapper or an athlete. Sure, he delves into other subjects, but the faces of my icons—2Pac, Biggie, Nas, Jay Z—are the ones that stand out. Regardless of the subject, many of his pieces are completely original takes on instantly recognizable people: Spike Lee double-fisting a Do the Right Thing pizza box and an Oscar; Grace Jones holding a mike along with a yoga pose; a Naomi Campbell-esque goddess in flight, dripping in gold chains. Other works present pop culture classics old and new, served with an interdisciplinary helping of cubist, surrealist, graphic and multimedia techniques: a 3-D study of legendary **PLAYBOY** covers with abstracted versions of Pamela and Kate; color-blocked, Picasso-ized renderings of Marilyn, Beyoncé and Jay Z; a Basquiat-inspired series on 2Pac. His interpretations, all executed with his signature vector-art style, are ones I’ve never seen before. There’s a sharpness to them, like the angles themselves. ¶ Almost always, when someone creates or reinvents a cocktail, others attempt to do the same. Naturel, who parlayed early*

design roles for brands such as Rocawear and Nike into 100,000 Instagram followers and a collectors list that now includes Rihanna and LeBron James, is no exception. Eventually the clones appeared. People started imitating his style and doing their own renditions of his mosaics, but none had the character of the originals. Something about the way Naturel transforms shapes into life is so simple and so brilliant. There can be only one creator of Naturel’s style, and it’s him.



Portrait of the artist.







ARTIST IN RESIDENCE



Previous page: Various, from the show *Some Magazines Under The Mattress (S.M.U.T.)*, a collaboration with Joseph Gross Gallery and 1xRUN. Acrylic and mixed media on cradled birch, 2015. **Above:** *Birds of Paradise*. Archival print on paper, 21¾ x 44 inches, 2014. **Below left:** *Royal Bather*. Archival print on paper, 19¾ x 19¾ inches, 2016. **Below right:** *Pxxxy Had Me Dead*. Acrylic on cradled wood, 40 x 57 inches, 2014. **Opposite page:** *Picasso Jay*. Archival print on paper, 19¾ x 19¾ inches, 2016.





ARTIST IN RESIDENCE





PLAYBACK



JANUARY 1966

Mr. Playboy is ready for his cover shoot.

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Every glass in this epic 50 shot glass collection sports the official Super Bowl logo of the year it represents on the front and game info on the back.

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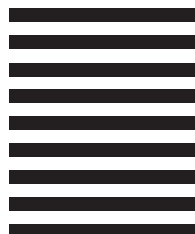
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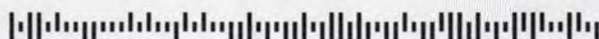


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